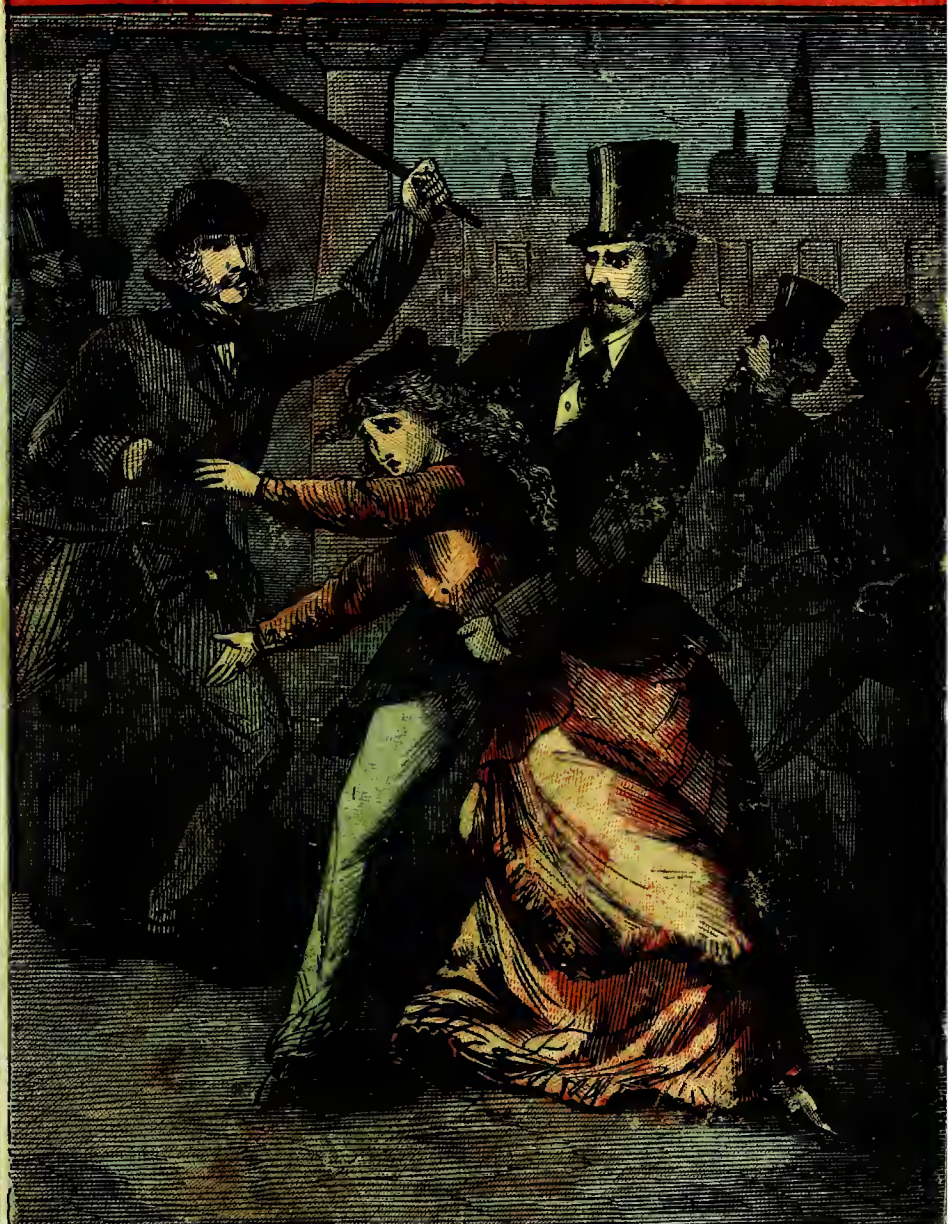




# MILDRED'S CROSS









THE  
HIGH ROAD TO RUIN.



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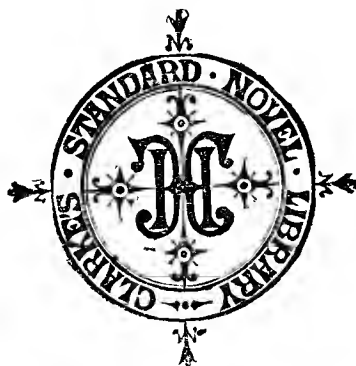
OR,

THE HIGH ROAD TO RUIN:

BY

W STEPHENS HAYWARD.

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK ANGEL," "STAR OF THE SOUTH," "THE  
FIERY CROSS," "THE REBEL PRIVATEER," ETC., ETC.



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DOCTOR ANDREW LORRIMER.  
IDOL'S EYE.

# THE HIGH ROAD TO RUIN.

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## PROLOGUE.

A YEAR was drawing to its close.

It had but a few minutes to exist before it was swept into the abyss of the past by the irresistible hand of Time.

A very sad and solemn occasion is the death of an old year and the birth of a new. Hearts that are callous beat quicker, while those that are sensitive, are anxious and hopeful—for they know that they are trembling on the threshold of the unknown.

The night was sharp and frosty ; a myriad of stars thronged the placid vault of heaven, while the moon hung like a ball of brightly-burnished silver in the midst of them. Icicles were pendant from the trees, and the streams were covered with thick sheets of ice.

Most of the inhabitants of Tuthin-y-Cwyd, a village in a picturesque part of South Wales, were sitting

round blazing fires, seeing the old year out and the new one in. Flasks of spirits and bottles of wine flanking substantial repasts might have been discovered upon many tables.

Although a temporary gloom had fallen over the people of the village, they evidently intended to give themselves up to good cheer and merry-making as soon as the knell of the departing year had been rung out by the iron tongues of the belfry.

There was, however, one exception to the general appearance of festivity. The grim and gaunt visage of death had intruded itself upon the serenity of a small household at the extremity of the village.

The house was occupied by a lady of the name of Millington. She was of good extraction, and at one period of her life, of ample means; but she had the misfortune to marry a man who abandoned himself to the shocking vice of intoxication. He died miserably, leaving his wife with two twin children.

Mrs. Millington dearly loved her boys—those sweet pledges of her affection for her husband—but she was a young wife, and her whole heart had been given to, and her affection centred upon, the father of her children.

In dying as he did, he administered a blow to her from which she never recovered. She gradually sank lower and lower, wasting away as a flower fades before the chills and blights of autumn.

Her only friend after her husband's untimely decease was the curate of the village of Tuthin-y-Cwyd.

**Mr.** Lovibond had been acquainted with her family for many years, and she retired to the still and pleasant Welsh hamlet, in order to avail herself of the advice and spiritual consolation that she was well aware she would receive from a truly good and Christian gentleman.

All Mr. Lovibond's efforts to heal the broken heart were unavailing. The unfortunate lady was the prey of a diseased mind, to which none could minister. She knew that she was doomed, nor did she murmur at her fate. A pious resignation filled her mind, and she had but to cast off her earthly garb to be a fit companion for the angels.

Though very weak, and much exhausted, Mrs. Millington had yet breath and strength enough to talk to the man of God, and listen to his comforting exhortation. A placid smile played around her once beautiful but now emaciated face. The future welfare of her children did not trouble her. She knew they would not want ; for she would leave them sufficient to educate and give them a footing in the world ; and she had the happy consciousness of having found an excellent protector for their tender years.

Mr. Lovibond had given her a sacred promise that he would guard the boys with parental care, and do all that lay in his power to make them worthy descendants of a sainted mother.

The poor lady's chief anxiety was, lest they should be tempted by their father's besetting sin. In order to allay this fear, the worthy curate, who was legally

appointed guardian and executor, declared that he would bring them up on strictly temperance principles.

Mrs. Millington had a presentiment that she should not see the birth of the new year. The doctor, the curate, and a nurse stood around her bedside. The services of the former were not needed ; but from a feeling of duty and friendship he stayed to the last. The curate had fallen upon his knees, and was offering up a prayer in low and impressive tones. The dying lady folded her arms across her breast, her lips moved, and she was spending the last moments of her brief and unhappy life in heartfelt and sincere devotion.

The eyes of the medical man wandered now and then towards the clock, which stood upon the mantelpiece. It wanted but one minute to twelve.

The curate continued to pray in the same calm and earnest manner.

Suddenly the deep booming of the church clock informed the watchers that the year was over. Silently they counted the strokes. A serene expression pervaded the features of Mrs. Millington. Her lips ceased to move ; and ere the clock had finished clanging out the hour, she was dead !

The doctor touched the curate gently upon the shoulder, for his scientific eye told him that all was over.

Rising to his feet, Mr. Lovibond murmured " Heaven receive her spirit ! " and turned to depart, for his work was ended.

## CHAPTER I.

## WHICH IS CHIEFLY DESCRIPTIVE.

SOME years have elapsed since the death of Mrs. Milington, at Tuthin-y-Cwyd. Mr. Lovibond fulfilled the duty that was entrusted to him in a most exemplary manner, having a religious sense of the obligation under which he was placed.

He had a daughter of his own ; and when his brother died, leaving a little girl to lament his loss, he consented to take charge of his niece. Mildred and Clara were both beautiful ; but they represented different types of beauty. The parson's daughter was fair, and fragile as a lily. Her complexion was delicately white, her hands small, her features well defined, and of that Saxon kind which is common amongst us islanders. Her hair was long, golden, and like floss silk—so soft and fine was it. The rosy bloom of health was on her cheeks, and the natural carmine of her lips added a charm to the pearly whiteness of her teeth.

Clara, on the other hand, was stately and queen-like—dark as the night, resolute and self-reliant ; tall, with flashing eyes, having a stern look, which repelled a stranger.

The brothers were unlike one another in general appearance, though both bore some slight resemblance to their mother. John had a more manly look than his brother Leonard, and was generally the foremost in

athletic sports and exercises, for Leonard was of a studious disposition, and much given to reading. The effect of his perpetual study was to make him look pale and more delicate than John, who, from always being in the fields or on the river, acquired a ruddy hue, and became strong and stalwart.

At the age of twenty, neither of them had ever touched anything stronger than water. The curate had fulfilled his pledge to the anxious mother. When the time came for them to choose a profession, John, who at school had always evinced a talent for drawing, elected to be a surveyor and architect; Leonard, on the other hand, preferred a sedentary life, and went as a clerk into a merchant's office in the City.

In order to facilitate the studies of the young men, Mr. Lovibond removed from Wales to the neighbourhood of London, settling down in the pleasant little village of Hornsey.

"How quietly and calmly our life has been passed up to the present time!" exclaimed Mildred to Clara, during a morning walk.

"Very quietly. Our little domestic stream has never yet been ruffled by a storm," replied Clara; "but will it always be so?"

"That is a question that has often arisen in my mind," Mildred said, thoughtfully. "It seems unnatural to be so happy and peaceful as we have been. Authors and poets say that life is full of toil and trouble."

"What would you give to raise the veil of the

future?" exclaimed Clara, with a light laugh. "We should then see if John is to be a great architect, and whether Leonard will arrive at the dignity of being a millionaire merchant prince."

"And more than that, dear Clara," said Mildred, "we should know who you are destined to marry."

"And you, Mildred—have you no curiosity—have you no wish to be enlightened as to your own fate?"

Mildred blushed, and became thoughtful. Scarcely paying any attention to the remarks which fell from her cousin. Secretly she admired John Millington; and, though Clara guessed that such was the case, she did not throw out any insinuation which would have annoyed her friend.

With the ready eye of a fond father, Mr. Lovibond noticed that John Millington was attached to Mildred. He saw, also, that she reciprocated his affection; and he remarked all this with pleasure—for he was an ardent advocate of early marriage, and wished above all things to see his daughter comfortably settled.

Life is short, and the tenure by which we hold it precarious. He was growing old; and were he to be cut off suddenly, there would be no one to take care of his girl, whom he loved tenderly.

Wishing to see John and Mildred man and wife, he allowed them every facility of communication, and smiled whenever he detected a loving glance pass between them.

He had the greatest confidence in John Millington—he would have trusted him with everything he had



in the world. The young man was perfect. He did not appear to have any vice whatever about him. No one could be more exemplary than he. Though he was, by reason of his business, obliged to be often in London, he did not give himself up to the dissipations of the metropolis.

He was a stranger to taverns and wine-shops—the fascinations of theatres and music-halls had no charm for him—billiards was a game of which he had not the remotest knowledge.

His only pleasure was to go to his work in Parliament Street, Westminster, early in the morning, and return home direct at night, conscious of having done his best to please his employers, who could not fail to be satisfied with so diligent and conscientious a worker.

He was rewarded by the smiles of Mildred, who loved him as fondly and devotedly as ever a warm-hearted girl loved a man who was in every way worthy of her affection.

John knew that Mr. Lovibond had some money in trust for him under his mother's will, and he was also aware that Mildred would, on her marriage, receive some money from her father, who, though not rich, was nevertheless moderately well off. There was positively nothing to interfere with a marriage between the young people ; but John had so much respect and regard for Mr. Lovibond, that he would not make a declaration of marriage to his daughter until he had previously informed him of his intention, and asked his permission to do so.

Tall, thick-set, handsome, athletic, gentlemanly, and unassuming in his manner, John might well feel confident of obtaining Mildred's hand ; and he was confident that he could win her and woo her if her father would give him his consent.

The old man was fond of walking in his garden. It was there that John found him, reclining in a rustic chair beneath the shade of a spacious mulberry tree. It was in the middle of the summer. John had left town early ; and the clock had barely struck the hour of six as he reached home.

Mr. Lovibond was reading ; but he laid down his book, and said, with a kindly smile, "you are back early, John ! Mildred will be pleased. She was wishing, half-an-hour ago, that either your brother or yourself would take her for a walk."

"I do not think Leonard will come till late," replied John. "He told me, as we were going to town this morning, that he had to superintend the shipment of a cargo of goods intended for the Australian markets, and that the task would last as long as the daylight."

"Ah ! he is a hard-working fellow ; So are the pair of you, for the matter of that ! You will find Mildred in the house. When she knows you have returned, I'll be bound she'll not be long in putting her bonnet on."

The old gentleman laughed, and John smiled, in order to keep him company ; but instead of going towards the house, as a dutiful lover should have done, he lin-

gered under the shade of the mulberry tree, and at last said, in a hesitating manner, "I—I would rather talk to you for a little while. To tell you the truth, I came home early on purpose."

"To talk to me, eh? Very well, you can do so, I shall be only too happy to listen to you," said Mr. Lovibond, raising his mild grey eyes, in which sparkled a benevolent intelligence.

"The fact is, Mr. Lovibond, I am in love with your daughter!" exclaimed John. "You must excuse my blunt way; but when I have anything to say I must out with it at once, or hold my tongue for ever."

"You love Mildred?" said Mr. Lovibond.

"I do; and heaven knows that my affection for her is pure and disinterested! I love her with all my heart; and have done so for some time!"

John had broken the ice, and having done so, found no difficulty in talking unreservedly to Mr. Lovibond, who smiled upon his suit, and despatched him to learn his fate from his daughter.

Mildred was in the conservatory—a small building at the back of the house, so contrived that it received the heat of the sun in its meridian. It was filled with choice plants and valuable exotics, which were under the sole care of Miss Lovibond, who was fond of flowers, and a student of botany.

She received John, as she always did, with a kind smile of welcome, and desisted from picking the dead leaves off some geraniums, which had, before his entrance, engrossed her attention. The petals of the

flowers were entirely white, and represented a new variety, which were held in much esteem by both gardeners and amateurs.

"I am glad you have come, John," she said. "I was only saying to my father, a short time ago, that I should like a walk as far as the wood and back. Clara is practising some music, and you know how serious and determined she is with anything she undertakes. Nothing will induce her to leave what she looks upon as work. Business before pleasure is the motto of City men, is it not?—and it is hers also."

John walked up to the conservatory, nearly annihilating one or two precious plants in his way, so blundering and uncertain were his footsteps. When he reached her side, he stopped, and began to talk to her in an impassioned tone. His was an impulsive nature, and if he had anything to say to anybody, he did not beat about the bush in telling it.

What he said to Mildred is not of any consequence.

The conversations of lovers are too sacred to be mentioned lightly. It is enough to say that half an hour passed so rapidly it seemed but five minutes. At the expiration of that time, they emerged from the conservatory hand in hand, and walked across the soft, yielding sward until they reached the mulberry tree.

Mr. Lovibond had not gone away. He was an apt student of the human heart, and he expected them.

Neither spoke aloud. They stood bashfully, and

with downcast eyes before him. The old man rose. His vision was dimmed with tears. He took two steps, and stood before them. Then he raised his hands, and said, in a pious tone, "Bless you, my children ! Heaven above us, bless you !"

\* \* \* \* \*

Now that the match was settled, and the irrevocable step had been taken, affairs went on gaily. It was arranged that John and Mildred should be made man and wife in six weeks from the day of his proposal—the father of the bride officiating at the altar of the pretty church of Hornsey.

John went to business as usual, and it was acknowledged on all hands that he was a rising man. His architectural drawings were marked with a gracefulness of outline and a grandeur of invention combined with great powers of elaboration.

A French gentleman called one day at the office in Parliament Street, and said that he wished for a design for a shooting-box, which he intended to erect upon some land he had lately bought in Cumberland.

The custom of the firm with which John Millington was studying was to bring in a portfolio filled with the drawings of all those who were in their service, to allow the customer to select his artist from the specimens placed before him.

John's drawings pleased the gentleman more than any of the others, and he decided upon having the desired sketch made by him. John did his best, and

had the satisfaction of being told that he had succeeded admirably.

It was necessary that the gentleman should see the draughtsman, and he was shown up-stairs for that purpose

The Frenchman was tall and tolerably good-looking. He wore a frock-coat closely buttoned over a white waistcoat, the edges of which showed above his cravat, which was artistically tied and fastened with a handsome horseshoe-pin, studded with emeralds and diamonds. His gloves were lavender-coloured, sewn with black. In his hand he carried a small cane, tipped with silver.

He was evidently, from his manner, a polished man of the world, accustomed to mix with gentlemen. John was considerably impressed with him ; but, though impressed, he could not help thinking that there was something about his pale face which denoted a fondness for late hours. He had a snake-like, treacherous eye, cold and pitiless in its restless glance ; and John came to an unfavourable conclusion respecting his visitor.

Yet his politeness, and his easy, familiar manner, were calculated to take an inexperienced man like John Millington by storm ; and so it eventually did.

Some conversation took place between them, after which the gentleman rose to depart.

“ Shall I send the sketch to you ? ” asked John.

“ Oh, no ; I will not trouble you. I shall be driving in this direction again in a week—will that be time enough for you ? ”

"Amply sufficient."

"It will? In that case I shall have the pleasure of paying you another visit shortly. For the present, good-bye!"

The affable Frenchman put on his hat, which he placed jauntily on his head, stroked his peaked beard, and gave an amiable twist to his moustache, preparatory to emerging into the outer air, and took his departure.

John opened the door for him, bowed, and returning to his desk, looked at a card which the French gentleman had given him.

It bore this address :

"Mr. Varney Vaillant, 154<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, Pall Mall."

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## CHAPTER II.

THE WEDDING.—JOHN MILLINGTON DRINKS HIS FIRST  
GLASS OF WINE, AND LIKES IT.

LET the bells ring! Let them diffuse their clangour throughout the reeling belfry—let them intoxicate the ears of the lovers with deight—for, if rightly interpreted, their sound proclaims a wedding.

The village of Hornsey was, on the first day in the week of September, thrown into a state of commotion and excitement, owing to the fact of a wedding being about to take place between two old and respected residents.

It was on that day that John Millington led Mildred to the altar. Mr. Lovibond arranged the wedding breakfast in his own way. He despised the conventional mode of breakfasting in a room, and had the table placed upon the lawn in the rear of his house.

Just before the party started for the church, John said to Mr. Lovibond, "I really quite forgot to tell you that I have invited a friend of mine to the wedding. He is very well off, and quite a nice fellow. I think you will like him."

"I hope so, I am sure, dear boy!" replied Mr. Lovibond. "Any friend of yours should stand in the same relation to me. Who is he, and where did you meet him?"

"He is a French gentleman, of the name of Varney Vaillant. He came one day to Brassey and Williamson's, and took a fancy to my drawings. I made a sketch for him, and he seems to have taken a great fancy to me; he said he would try and come to the wedding, but if he could not, I was to excuse him."

"It isn't a decided engagement, then?"

"Oh, no; though I must confess I should like to have him."

"You may have acquired a friend worth having, dear boy," said Mr. Lovibond, calmly; "but I have always advised you to be discreet in making acquaintances!"

At this moment something occurred to occupy their attention, and for the time Mr. Varney Vaillant was forgotten.



The distance between Mr. Lovibond's house and the church was so short that it was not worth while to order carriages. The villagers, if those who live in a London suburb can be called villagers, heard that the bride and bridegroom would walk to the church, and they lined the roadway leading from their homes to the sacred edifice, forming a lane through which the party had to pass.

Many were the exclamations of admiration which the personal appearance of the bride, and the manly demeanour of the bridegroom, elicited from the spectators.

While the marriage ceremony was being performed, a splendidly-appointed equipage drove up to the church-door, and Mr. Varney Vaillant alighted. Soon after entering and walking up the aisle, he did not join the party, but allowed the vergers to show him into a pew, where he remained until all was completed. He was, however, the first to congratulate John, who in a timid voice said, "Mr. Vaillant—Mrs. Millington."

Mrs. Millington! It seemed so strange to Mildred to be called Mrs. Millington; but she recognised the fact that she was a wife, and a new era in her life had commenced.

"What a superb creature!" was Mr. Vaillant's inward exclamation. "She is a goddess! Venus herself was not more lovely!"

His eulogium was fully justified, for Mildred had never in the whole course of her existence appeared to more advantage. She trembled, and coloured, and

clung tenaciously to John, and looked up into his face to exchange sympathetic glances.

Oh ! how proud she was of him as they walked from the church through the world of curious but friendly people, who would say what they thought, and who insisted upon cheering and shouting themselves hoarse.

He was her husband, and they said he was handsome ; and so he was. They said he was good and generous, and a pattern of virtue ; and so he was. What joy to have such a man as her partner through life ! How thankful she ought to be to Providence for all its goodness.

To Mildred, it was simply a union of one fond heart with another—an epoch of happiness—a prelude to a lifetime of content, through the vista of which she could discern little wee darlings clinging to her arms and calling her by the holy name of mother.

The wedding-breakfast had been tastefully laid out, principally under Clara's superintendence ; for though the local confectioner considered himself an adept at arranging anything of the kind, he did not succeed in pleasing Clara, who, in her usual imperious way, ordered him to the rightabout, and did the work herself.

There were little towers and castles made of sugar, never intended to be eaten, which had done duty over and over again on similar occasions—the Tower of Pisa, leaning on one side, being conspicuous amongst them together with Warwick Castle, in the sugar moat of

of which were two stately swans. Flowers—cut and growing in pots—were placed everywhere in great profusion. Viands were plentiful—all the delicacies of the season, as it is the custom of the *entrepreneurs* to say, might have been discovered; but there was one thing missing—and that was wine.

Not a single bottle of Champagne or sherry was to be seen. Neither was beer either bottled or on draught, allowed to enliven the banquet. Mr. Lovibond had not forgotten Mrs. Millington's dying behest, and he thought that he should exercise a wise discretion in pursuing his system of total abstinence even on such a festive occasion as the marriage of his daughter with his ward.

Mr. Varney Vaillant was introduced to everybody; but, contrary to John's expectation, he was not very cordially received. Of course, he was treated with the utmost courtesy and politeness, but there was something wanting in Mr. Lovibond's greeting which John did not like.

The Frenchman did not take the slightest notice of this. He laughed and talked to everybody—was soon the life and soul of the party.

No one expects a bride or bridegroom to be very lively on the morning of their marriage: a quiet and sober demeanour more becomes them. Mr. Lovibond's hilarity was at all times naturally of a milk-and-water description, and Clara and the two bridesmaids were staid and decorous, while Leonard did his best to talk and chat, and confessed to himself that Mr. Varney

Vaillant was an invaluable addition to the party.

It was a lovely morning. The weather was beautifully fine, and would have tempted any one but steady, hardworking John Millington to take a holiday, and run over to Paris with his young wife.

But, no.

It was Mr. Lovibond's wish that they should spend the honeymoon at Hornsey ; and they did not murmur at a decree which would have terribly annoyed some newly-married couples.

After taking a walk round the garden, everybody sat down at the table. The bells of the church, which could be plainly seen in the distance, rang out a merry peal. Mr. Varney Vaillant shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly when he saw that there was no wine upon the table.

His servant, who had put the mail phaeton up at some neighbouring stables, was standing on the lawn, with a group of domestics and their favoured friends.

Mr. Vaillant beckoned to him, and he advanced. The master whispered a few words into the man's ear, and he went away.

But scant justice was done to the galantines, pates, in puddings, fowls, hams, and other good things. Conversation flagged. Mildred looked as if she would like to cry, or faint ; and there was an evident wish in John's eyes to take Mildred's hand in his, and comfort her.

The want of a little wine to enliven the proceedings and to set some toasts on foot, was apparent.

The bridesmaids were not teetotallers ; and they looked a little disappointed.

Five to ten minutes elapsed, and then Mr. Varney Vaillant's servant returned, bearing a basket in his arms. He set it down at the side of the table near his master, and began to open it. After cutting the cords with a knife, he had accomplished his task ; and throwing some straw on the grass, to the surprise of everybody he produced some bottles of champagne, and placed them on the table.

Taking one in his hand, Mr. Varney Vaillant exclaimed, addressing John, "I hope you will pardon my apparent rudeness, but I thought our friendship was sufficiently strong to permit me to make you a present of some wine."

John was utterly astonished, and knew not what to do or say.

Had a thunderbolt descended amongst the little party, they could not have been more astonished.

Mr. Lovibond was red in the face with resentment—we will not say rage, for he had too much command over himself to fly into a passion.

Rising from his chair, as if he were about to make a speech, he exclaimed, "if my son-in-law pardons you, sir, I will not. What right have you, a stranger, to introduce wine to a table at which it is forbidden and carefully excluded?"

Mr. Varney Vaillant stroked his moustache, and preserved the imperturbable calm which was his chief characteristic.

"Really, my reverend friend," he replied, with a slight tinge of sarcasm, "I had not the slightest intention of insulting you. I brought the wine in a thoughtless manner as a present to my friend, Mr. Millington, thinking that it would be an acceptable addition to a wedding breakfast. I give you my word, that I had no more idea than the man in the moon that you or your family were impregnated with temperance ideas."

"Not ideas, sir ; call things by their right names—say principles," said Mr. Lovibond, sternly.

"Certainly—principles, if you like," rejoined Varney Vaillant. "I presume you have no objection, now the wine is here, to my drinking the health of the most lovely bride it has ever been my good fortune to see?"

"I shall say nothing sir," replied Mr. Lovibond; "you will please yourself. You are not my guest, and I only entered my protest against wine-bibbing in the interest of the young people who are under my charge."

A malignant pleasure seemed to pervade the countenance of Varney Vaillant, as he cut the cork, broke the wire, popped the cork, and poured out a glass of fizzing, bubbling wine, sparkling like morning dew in the sunbeams. No one spoke a word. Every eye was riveted upon the daring Frenchman, who with an amount of assurance all his own, advanced to Mildred and handed her the glass.

She politely, but steadfastly, refused it. He then

proffered it to John, saying, "drink, my dear fellow—drink to the health of an incomparable lady, who will make you an excellent wife ! Drink—drink ! and may you be happy !"

An expression—a spasm almost of irresolution—ran over John's face. He had—strange as it may be to say it—never yet tasted wine or alcohol. His friends had often taunted him ; and, truth to tell, he had been on the point of entering a tavern more than once, but the recollection of his father's fate had restrained him.

Mr. Lovibond had very frequently instilled into his mind a hatred and a horror of strong drinks ; and he always supplemented his diatribes with an account of Mr. Millington's death.

Consequently, John was restrained on the threshold of the public-house by the memory of his father's end ; but when Varney Vaillant handed the glass to him, and continued to hold it while he made his mind up the blood seemed to fly to his head. He threw purdence to the winds ; and snatching the glass from Vaillant, drained it to the bottom.

When the wine passed John's lips, it appeared to fly through his veins with inconceivable velocity. He had never known such strange and yet such pleasing sensations as those to which it subjected him. An unwonted light danced in his eyes ; and, seizing the second glass of wine, he drank it also.

Varney Vaillant returned to his seat ; and, thinking it a fitting opportunity, took the liberty of making

a speech, in which he complimented the bride and bridegroom.

Mr. Lovibond was seriously amazed ; but he retained his place at the head of the table until the breakfast was over. A heavy sadness fell upon him, and a presentiment of coming evil took possession of him. He never remembered having seen John Millington so excited. He laughed in a wild manner rivalling the vivacity of the Frenchman.

An hour or more elapsed. There was no longer any excuse for remaining at the table. Mildred and her bridesmaids, together with Clara, retired. Mr. Lovibond spoke to John, and asked him to go into the house, but he refused.

His eyes were fixed upon the champagne which stood between him and Varney Vaillant. "What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh" is an old saying. His father had been a drunkard ; and having once tasted it, John had a hankering after wine.

He was, as it were, riveted to the seat upon which he was sitting. Fascinated by the wine, he could not leave it.

It was John's wedding-day, and Mr. Lovibond was loth to make a disturbance and mar the harmony of the occasion. He thought of his daughter, and went away, hoping for the best.

Leonard remained ; but though he was pressed to drink, he was proof against all temptation. Not so John ; he drank glass after glass with the Frenchman, upon whom the wine took no effect whatever.



## CHAPTER III.

"SHE IS VERY LOVELY."

MR. VARNEY VAILLANT lighted a cigar, and crossing his legs in a manner indicative of laziness and comfort, began to smoke.

Much to Leonard's disgust and amazement, his brother continued to drink the champagne, of which he had already had more than enough.

Thinking that his relationship, and the very friendly terms upon which they had always lived, gave him a right to expostulate with him, Leonard said, "I hope, John, you won't mind what I am going to say?"

"What is it? Say what you like," replied John. "This is the happiest day of my life, and I mean to be jolly."

"Quite right," interjected Varney Vaillant; "enjoy life when you are young. The world and nature does not give you much chance of doing so when you grow old."

"Those are my sentiments exactly," cried John. "I'll give you a toast, Vaillant. Fill your glass. 'Here's to the bride—to my wife!'"

Again the sparkling wine creamed and bubbled in the glasses. John's brain reeled and seemed to be on fire. The vertigo of sudden intoxication was rising to his head.

"That's a toast I drink with the greatest willingness and pleasure. 'The bride! May her married life be happy!'" exclaimed Varney Vaillant.

John was about to fill his glass again, when Leonard, almost with tears in his eyes, caught him by the hand, and said, "John, dear John, have a little discretion. You are not accustomed to drinking. You will take more than is good for you."

"Perhaps I have already! Perhaps you will say I am drunk!" cried John, his eyes flashing angrily.

"If I did, I should not be far wrong; but I don't wish to excite you," replied Leonard. "Leave off while there is yet time. Think of our dead father—what brought him to an early grave!"

"Don't begin to preach to me," said John. "I'm not in the humour for it. This is my wedding-day; and if a man isn't jo-jolly then, I should like to know when he is to be?"

"If you won't listen to reason," said Leonard, whose character was tolerably decided, "I will take the law into my own hands, and risk the chance of offending your friend in order to save you."

Varney Vaillant had taken the only two remaining bottles of wine out of the basket, and placed them on the table, preparatory to drawing the corks.

Leonard stepped up to them, and seizing them by the necks, hurled them suddenly with all his force at the trunk of a neighbouring tree, against which they were dashed into a hundred fragments.

Varney Vaillant's face flushed a little at first; but

controlling himself, he laughed and exclaimed, "'Pon my word, I think you have done a most sensible thing ! I give you credit for your determination."

"He will thank me for it afterwards," replied Leonard, pointing to his brother.

John, however, did not just then seem to appreciate the effort that had been made in his behalf ; he grew terribly angry, and rising, advanced to his brother, attempting to strike him ; but his footsteps were so unsteady, that he very nearly fell down several times.

"Oh !" cried Leonard, horror-stricken ; "what will Mr. Lovibond and Mildred say to this ? The man is drunk !"

"Dr—drunk ! you're dr—drunk !" said John, with a feeble and idiotic laugh, placing his hands on the edge of the table to steady himself.

Varney Vaillant now came to the rescue, saying, "If you will support him on the one side, I will on the other. It will not do to let him go into the house, so we had better place him under some tree where he can sleep off the wine in the shade. Champagne soon evaporates, and he will be all right and himself again in a couple of hours."

Leonard thought that nothing better could be done, and he followed the Frenchman's advice. They conducted John to the upper part of the garden, and laid him under the cool shelter of a cedar tree. In two minutes he was fast asleep.

"Believe me, Mr. Millington," said Varney Vaillant,

in an apologetic tone, "I had not the remotest intention of causing any dissension in your family. My conviction was, that a few bottles of wine would enliven the proceedings, and be an acceptable present."

"You see, sir, that it was anything but an acceptable present," replied Leonard, stiffly.

He was so much annoyed at what had happened, that he had scarcely patience enough to be decently civil to the Frenchman, whom he regarded as the primary cause of the misfortune.

"Come," added Varney Vaillant; "let us go into the house and console the ladies for the unavoidable absence of the bridegroom."

Leonard looked up wonderingly. The consummate effrontery of this man was something extraordinary. It created a species of admiration, if it did not command respect.

Mildred had changed her dress, and was becomingly attired in light and flowing attire. She was standing at the door of the conservatory, in conversation with Clara.

A flush of surprise reddened her cheek when she saw Leonard and the Frenchman coming alone and unaccompanied towards them.

"Why, Leonard," she exclaimed, drawing her breath quickly, "where—where is John?"

"He felt a little sleepy, and has laid down for half an hour," replied Leonard, wishing, if possible, to hide the truth from her—or, at any rate, the whole truth.

"Sleepy ! In the middle of the day, and—and on such an occasion as this !" she gasped.

"I must congratulate you, Mrs. Millington, upon your appearance. You certainly look most beautiful," exclaimed Varney Vaillant, adding to himself, "Fine girl ! She is perfect ; and much too good for a weak-minded fellow like her husband."

Mildred turned from him, with a shudder.

"Did you speak to me ?" she said.

"I certainly had that honour."

"This is not the time for compliments, sir," said Clara, sternly. "Mrs. Millington is anxious about her husband ; and if, as I fear, you have led him into a state of intoxication, you are the last person in the world who should speak to any member of this family ; and I frankly tell you that I marvel at your effrontery."

The Frenchman smiled, showing his white, glistening teeth. He liked passionate women. In their rage he found a source of pleasure and delight.

"Oh, where is John ?" cried Mildred, in passionate but piteous accents. "Tell me, Leonard—tell me—is it true that he is tipsy ? Take me to him——But, no ; I cannot see him as I dread he is. Oh, heaven ! pity me and give me strength to bear this heavy trial !"

Leonard endeavoured to calm her ; but all in vain. She began to sob and cry in a most heart-rending manner. Her sobs brought Mr. Lovibond to the spot ; and he spoke with the tenderness and soothing softness of a father to her.

All at once, her rage, her passion, her grief—call it what you will—seemed to concentrate itself upon Varney Vaillant ; for, stretching out her hand in a denunciatory manner, she said, "He is the cause of it—he is the serpent who has ruined my husband !"

Exhausted by the violence of her emotion, she fell back in her father's arms, and became hysterical.

"If you have an atom of gentlemanly feeling, sir," exclaimed Mr. Lovibond, "you will instantly leave this house, which it would have been better had you never entered. Go at once ! I request—I order you !"

"It would give me much pleasure to comply with your somewhat imperious command," returned Varney Vaillant, who was the only one of the party who had any self-possession ; but I feel it my duty—my imperative duty—to look after my friend. When I see that he is himself again, and when he wishes me to leave him, I shall do so ; but—not—before."

He uttered the last words slowly and distinctly, and looked round him defiantly.

Leonard felt inclined to attack and try to forcibly expel him ; but he was restrained from attempting to do so by the reflection that Mr. Lovibond was strongly opposed to acts of violence, and that any scene would only create a scandal, and that Mildred would be much shocked.

"My dear sir," continued Varney Vaillant, "you are, all of you, a little excited. When you are cooler you will admit that you are attaching more interest to what has taken place than it really deserves. In a short

time Mr. Millington will wake up, and see the folly of what he has done. The *contretemps* was not purposely or maliciously contrived by me. It was simply and purely an accident, and no one—not even his wife—can regret it more than I do ; and as far as I am concerned it shall never occur again. I will watch by his side until he returns to consciousness, so that I may be the first to point out to him the sinful folly of which he has been guilty.”

“You speak very sensibly,” said Mr. Lovibond, not knowing what to think. “Perhaps I have judged you harshly. Heaven grant it so !”

Making a low bow, Varney Vaillant walked away, and sought the tree under which John was lying.

The garden seemed a Paradise ; but it had its snake—for Varney Vaillant once more muttered, “She is very lovely !”

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## CHAPTER IV.

### VARNEY VAILLANT RECOVERS LOST GROUND.

WHEN the sun was casting lengthened shadows upon the earth, and the mid-day heat had worn off, and given place to the cool eventide, Mr. Varney Vaillant awoke from a reverie into which he had fallen, and looking at his watch, saw that it was half-past five.

John Millington evinced no signs of returning to consciousness, so that his friend thought it best to

rouse him, which he did by seizing his arm and shaking him rather roughly.

"What is the matter?" cried John, starting up and looking wildly around him.

"There is nothing much the matter," Varney Vaillant replied. "It's getting late, and I thought I'd better wake you."

John pressed his hand to his brow, and murmured, "How my head aches! What *can* have happened to me?"

"Don't you remember?" said the wily Frenchman, "you would taste my champagne?—and you had a drop too much; so, in a short time, you were *entre deux vins*, as we say in France."

"Drank too much! Did—did I get tipsy?" asked John, speaking thickly and huskily.

"Well, I don't think there is much doubt about that!" exclaimed Varney Vaillant with a laugh. "I did all I could to prevent you indulging too freely, but you were headstrong, and would have your own way. At first, I thought a glass or two of wine would do you no harm—nor do I still think it would have done; only, unfortunately, you did not know when to stop."

"Does my wife know of this?" inquired John, whose face wore a painfully anxious expression.

"Unfortunately, she does; but I have done all in my power for you in that quarter. You will have little difficulty in making up any little estrangement that may have arisen between you."

"Estrangement! Don't talk of anything of that sort,



on my wedding-day," cried John. "What a fool I have been ! Why, I have been false to all the traditions of my youth ! Satan himself must have taken possession of me, or I could never have been guilty of such folly !"

"I really have very little consolation to offer you," said his companion. "You must be more prudent and circumspect the next time you drink a glass of wine."

"The next time !" repeated John. "Please God, nothing stronger than water shall ever pass my lips again. I have done wrong once, but I see my error. They say that where there is shame, there may be amendment ; and if ever a man were ashamed of having disgraced himself, I am."

Varney Vaillant said nothing : he let John speak, and run himself down, like a clock. It was only natural that remorse should take possession of him. Presently, he complained of a racking headache, and said that his mouth and throat were terribly parched. The Frenchman drew a flask from his pocket, and poured some brandy into a little tin cup, which fitted into the bottom of the flask. Then he took from his waistcoat a small phial, which contained a colourless liquid, ten drops of which he let fall into the brandy.

This he handed to John, saying, "Drink !"

"What is it ?"

"Medicine. Drink it, for it will do you good."

John took it with a trembling hand, and swallowed it, with a shiver.

"It is like liquid fire !" he exclaimed. "It seems to scorch me up ! What was it ?"

"Only a little chloric ether, in a wine-glass of brandy. Don't you feel better already?"

"Yes ; I must admit that I am not so tremulous and shaky," replied John, brightening up and rising to his feet.

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## CHAPTER V.

### TIME RUNS ON.—JOHN RENEWS HIS INTIMACY WITH VARNEY.

FOR some time, nothing would induce John Millington to drink anything stronger than that which assuaged the thirst of Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

The newly-married couple spent the honeymoon at Hornsey ; and it is not too much to say that they spent a very, very happy six weeks, contented with themselves, their position, their prospects, and everything about them.

John would often laugh, and say to his wife, "How ever I could have been such a goose as to be led away by Varney, is more than I can imagine."

And she would reply : "Never mind, dear—don't think of it ; all is forgotten and forgiven. For my part, I begin to regard it in the light of an advantage rather than a misfortune—for it has shown you the evils of intemperance, and you are not likely to be led away again."

It is natural for every young wife to wish for an establishment of her own. There is a sense of inde-

pendence about "one's own house" which is remarkably pleasing to the youthful matron ; and Mildred always supported John when he talked about taking a villa—"one of those bran-new places, you know, about five-and-twenty or thirty pounds a-year, out Fulham way, or Kilburn."

Mr. Lovibond gravely shook his head : he objected to the scheme *in toto*. Certainly, he liked the society of his son-in-law and daughter, but he was not so selfish as to wish to keep them at home for his own sake ; it was rather for their sake that he opposed the intended migration.

At length, John made a compromise. He said he would take a house in the north of London, so that he would be able to walk over or run down to Hornsey whenever he liked without much trouble.

The great question was settled at last during an autumn evening. The weather was growing chill and cold. Icy blasts swept over the plains of the north, and came flapping their frosty wings, and casting their freezing breath over the sunny south. The leaves had fallen in melancholy profusion from the trees, and were lying in yellow-coloured heaps in all directions. A sharp frost was all that was needed to strip their branches, and lay them bare and naked. The scarlet geraniums looked drooping and worn-out ; their leaves seemed to supplicate to be taken into the hothouse. The dahlias and chrysanthemums were no longer the blooming beauties that they had been. Truly, winter was at hand.

It was not pleasant to sit in the garden under the trees, and fires were openly talked about. The little party, as yet unbroken, were gathered together in the drawing-room, and John, who had been house-hunting for the last three days, was ready to make his report.

"I could get nothing at anything like a reasonable rent in the place I wished to settle down in," he said ; "but at Fulham I found a house that I think will do very well. The rent is five-and thirty pounds a-year, and the taxes are not very heavy."

"So you are determined to go, John?" said Mr. Lovibond, fixing his eyes upon him reproachfully.

"The separation must happen some day, my dear Mr. Lovibond," answered John ; "and my wife seems to have set her heart upon being her own mistress ; and I must say I think it only judicious to humour her. I am very sorry to leave your very excellent society and hospitable dwelling ; but——"

"Say no more ! I see you are resolved to go, and so it is useless to oppose your doing so. My only wish is that you may prosper."

Mildred got up and threw her arms round her father's neck, and kissed him tenderly. The tears came into her eyes at the thought of leaving him, and she almost wished that she had not persuaded John to be so resolute in the matter. However, the die was cast, and she could but echo the old man's wish, and hope that they might prosper.

John was now of age ; and the money that his mother had left to be divided between his brother and

himself was duly handed over to them by Mr. Lovibond, who paid it into a joint-stock bank in their names and to their separate accounts.

John had left his instructors, Brassey and Williamson, and re-established himself in an office on the second-floor, in Craven Street, Strand. He had received many promises of support, and there was every prospect of his doing very well, as during the first week of his independence he obtained work enough to last him for a month.

He had made his wife a promise that he would not call on Varney Vaillant, and he had religiously kept his word. He had done more than that. Sometimes it was necessary for him to go to Piccadilly or St. James's Street; but he always avoided Pall Mall, lest he might by some accident meet the volatile Frenchman.

John took the house at Fulham for a year, and furnished it elegantly and comfortably, but not extravagantly. Of course, he had a piano for his wife, who was an accomplished musician, and would have felt the deprivation most keenly had she been deprived of her favourite instrument.

It was a newly-built house, in an unfinished neighbourhood, which was rapidly being covered with houses, and becoming populous. The windows bowed out a little, and gave a tasty appearance to the house, which had a second storey. The garden was a miserable strip of ground, incapable of nourishing by its own unaided efforts so much as a nettle. At the back, the look-out was dismal in the extreme. The eye wan-

dered over an expanse of ground which had been cut and hacked about by a speculative builder, who had dug the foundations of some new buildings ; but, apparently, the Bankruptcy Court had stayed his Vandal hand, as nothing more was done ; still the relics of his enterprise remained.

In the front, the scene was a little more lively—for it revealed a public-house, some shops, a row of small villa residences, with a pawnbroker's at the corner ; and in the distance, huge funereal-looking gasometers belonging to some company, reared their heads, like monsters of ill-omen. Beyond them, was a long line of muddy shore, and then the river.

Still it was a house ; and more than that, it was Mildred's own house—her ambitions was gratified. It was her own, and she had John to share it with her. When a young wife has a kind and loving husband, and her own establishment she wants nothing more.

John found it easy to reach his office—he could go by boat or omnibus. Everything prospered with him ; Mr. Lovibond's good wishes appeared to have followed him. Winter came on, and it was sharp and severe. People shook their heads, prophesied provisions at famine prices, and foretold misery for the poor.

One evening, when John was going home, he had occasion to wait for the white omnibus he travelled by. He had just bought an evening newspaper, and was standing near a lamp-post, at Piccadilly Circus, to glance over the summary of the day's news. Suddenly some one touched him on the shoulder, and a familiar

voice exclaimed, "Is it you, old friend!"

John dropped his paper, and turned nervously round—for he recognised the voice, and knew that Varney Vaillant stood by his side.

He was half pleased, half sorry at the *rencontre*. He was pleased, because he did not personally dislike Varney, and he remembered that his champagne had a most pleasant taste; he was sorry, because he knew that when he told his wife whom he had encountered, she would grieve.

"How do you do?" he said, grasping his hand warmly. "I have not seen you lately!"

"Then the fault was yours, if you had the inclination!" returned the other. "You knew where to find me. But tell me where you have been; on the Continent, honeymooning it, I suppose?" Happy boy! What a thing it is to love, and have the woman of your choice!"

John flushed, and did not know how to reply. He was a plain-spoken man himself, and the sort of badinage and flowery talk that Varney Vaillant employed, bewildered him.

"I was on the point of going home!" he exclaimed. "We dine at six; will—will you come with me?"

"Shall I be a welcome guest? I fear not. No, no; I will not call upon your wife in an unceremonious manner. I will go another day. You shall tell me where you live, and come with me and have a glass of sherry, which will give you an appetite for dinner."

"There is my card, which contains both my private

and business address," said John, taking the paste-board from his pocket-book and handing it to the Frenchman. "You must excuse my not drinking the sherry, though, for you know I never touch wine."

"I know you *have* touched it!" replied Varney, with a laugh,—“and, what is more, you will do so again, or I am much mistaken!”

"You really must excuse me!" cried poor John, fluttering about like a bird in the toils.

"Be a man!" said the tempter. "A glass of wine won't kill you. Come along—take my arm—I want to speak to you."

John had little strength of mind. His character was a good one, but it was lamentably weak. He took the Frenchman's arm, and they walked down Waterloo Place, Varney chatting gaily, and in an entertaining manner, as was his custom.

"I want to talk to you, old friend!" he exclaimed. "It is now some time since you made that excellent sketch of a shooting-box for me. A clever builder has been hard at work, and the result of his labour is a very pretty and picturesque little building. Nothing would delight me more than to take you into the country and show you your paper design in bricks and mortar. I was exhibiting it—for I am free to confess that I am rather proud of it,—I was exhibiting it last week to some friends of mine in the Guards, who ran down with me into the north for a day or two, and they begged me to introduce them to you, as they wanted something similar. If your time is not fully



occupied, it may be worth your while—for they are rich men, and money is no object to them.”

“Thanks !” said John. “It was very kind of you to think of me. Bring them to my office in London with you some day. What sort of plan do they want ?”

“They require something like mine, as I told you. It must be solid and substantial, but yet pretty,—not one of those houses of parliament things that make Mr. Ruskin angry——”

“I know !” hastily interrupted John, who was becoming excited over a subject which always had great interest for him. He was really a clever young man, and he knew it ; nevertheless, it pleased him to be told so, and he was delighted at the idea of getting an order from two gentlemen in the Guards who had plenty of money and did not mind expense.

They turned down Pall Mall, and continued to talk about architecture until they reached the Reform Club, up the steps of which Varney led him. John had never been inside a club, and he felt rather proud of entering one, in the society of his well-dressed friend, who took him into the smoking-room and ordered some wine.

John found the sherry remarkably pleasant, and drank a glass, saying, “It’s against my rule, but one don’t meet with old friends every day.”

“Of course not,” answered Vaillant, taking care to fill his glass again.

“Sherry, I believe, is less potent than champagne ?”

“Certainly ! Sherry is a wine that you may drink

at any time. It makes some people bilious, but nobody intoxicated."

"In that case, I may drink it with impunity?"

"I should say so," replied Vaillant, who lighted a cigar, and offered John one, who refused, saying that he did not smoke.

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Mr. Varney Vaillant, with a prolonged stare. "Does your abstinence arise from inability? or is it a mortification of the flesh, for conscience' sake?"

"To tell you the truth, I have never attempted it," said John, bashfully, wishing he was a man of the world, who could indulge in fashionable vices without any ill-effect.

"Begin now. Try this weed; it's as mild as hay!" said Varney.

John took the cigar, lighted it, and began to smoke. He became rather white in the face—the smoke made him cough, so that he took several glasses of sherry to wash it down. He felt rather uncomfortable, what with the smoke and the wine; but his pride prevented him from saying so, though he would have given worlds if he could have rushed from the room, dashed the cigar into the gutter, and called a cab to drive him home.

The handsome clock, with the heavy pendulum, informed him that it was six o'clock. He should keep his wife waiting—which was a thing he had never done since their marriage. She would wonder what had become of him—perhaps think he had met with an

accident, and alarm herself until she became ill.

Varney followed his gaze, which rested upon the clock ; and interpreting his thoughts, exclaimed : " Six o'clock ! Bless me ! how the time slips away. Your wife will not wait dinner for you, I suppose ? Will she not imagine you are detained on business ? "

" Oh, no ! She will, I am assured be quite frightened about me. "

" Then send her a telegram ; that will reach her in half an hour. "

He beckoned the waiter before John could reply, requested a sheet of paper, and wrote on it : " Engaged with a friend. Shall not be late. " He dated the telegram from the Reform Club, and sent it to " Mrs. Millington, at No. 3, High Park Terrace, Fulham, " which address he copied from the card John had given him. The servant took it from him, and was instantly despatched to the office.

" That will quiet Mrs. Millington ! " he remarked. " It would be very hard if a man could not dine with a friend occasionally. Marriage would be a curse instead of a blessing, if it destroyed all the joys of bachelor existence. "

" Dine ! " cried John. " I did not promise — " "

" That's true ; but I hope I may have the pleasure of your company, nevertheless. Sir Falcon Bridges of the Blues, and Lord Mountturrett, have an engagement with me, and will, I am sure, be charmed to meet you. "

" You are very kind ; let it be so, " replied John. " I will finish this cigar after dinner, I think. "

"When you like. Throw it away, and take a little bitters with your sherry—it will give a tone to the stomach."

Mr. Vaillant had ordered dinner at seven o'clock, and in about half an hour his friends dropped in. John's spirits had been raised by the wine he had taken, and he felt easy when he thought of the telegram he had sent to his wife. Had the message not gone he would not have stayed, for he was too good-hearted to be at all happy when he knew that his poor little wife was bemoaning his absence, and crying her heart out.

John, however, was little aware that he was then commencing his downward career.

He was introduced to Sir Faleon Bridges and Lord Mountturret, who treated him with the utmost suavity

The dinner was *recherche* in the extreme. The wines were beyond praise; and John felt constrained to drink, for the poor and halting reason that the others did. He did not like to be singular.

After dinner came dessert, and then an adjournment to the smoking-room.

It was by this time nearly ten o'clock, and John was a little noisy. His aristocratic friends looked amusedly at him, as if they thought it was a pity he could not take his wine quietly; and when he went off like the snuff of a candle, and fell under the table, overcome by the fumes of tobacco, and the wine he had taken, they smiled, and said it was no more than they had expected.

Varney Vaillant smiled also, and followed the waiters, who conducted, or rather carried, John to a cab, into which he was unceremoniously deposited.

"Driver," said Mr. Vaillant, "give me your number."

The man did so.

"Here is your fare," continued Vaillant ; and five shillings in excess of it. Take this gentleman to 3, High Park Terrace, Fulham ; and see that no grief come to him during the journey."

The man touched his hat ; and drove off at a quick pace in the direction of Piccadilly.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### WORSE AND WORSE.

TIME again fled by. The winter passed ; and spring, in all its magnificent freshness, came. John Millington caused his wife much trouble and anxiety, for it was no uncommon occurrence for him to come home partially, if not wholly, intoxicated.

Leonard presented a strange contrast to his brother. He did not permit anything to take his attention from business ; and grew in favour day by day with his employers.

During the winter he had been much at Hornsey, though he took up his abode with his brother, at Fulham. Clara was the all-powerful attraction which drew him into the country. Mr. Lovibond

looked on with a sigh of regret. "You will all leave me, and the old man will be alone in the world!" he was wont to say; but he, nevertheless, gave his consent, and Leonard and Clara, were affianced.

Being a prudent young man, he would not marry at once. His employers had spoken about sending him abroad for a time, to manage some portion of their foreign trade, and he postponed his marriage until he had returned from his foreign journey.

Clara went frequently to visit Mr. and Mrs. Millington, at High Park Terrace; and she did this the more willingly because she could enjoy the society of Leonard, and, at the same time, comfort Mildred in her affliction.

For she was afflicted. Was it nothing to see her husband going headlong to ruin and perdition? Was it nothing to know that she would soon be a mother; and that the father of her child was addicted to habits of intemperance, which, if not checked in time, would make him a confirmed drunkard? Was it nothing to look forward and see only abject misery, beggary, and starvation for her and her offspring in the future?

Who can wonder that she loathed the sight of fermented liquors, and begged and prayed to her husband on her knees, and with tears in her eyes, not to give way to the fatal habit which was gradually coiling itself round him, as a constrictor around its prey?

Only those wives who have such husbands, or those sisters who have intemperate brothers, know the dreadful sensation which takes possession of a woman when

an intoxicated man, who is really dear to them, reels into the room, the red and swollen eyes, the incoherent talk, the straggling gait, the parched lips and breath odorous of spirits, the palsied mind, all combine to create a feeling of disgust, which would be akin to hatred, were not pity to step in !

Since the eventful evening on which John renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Varney Vaillant he had been unable to resist the fascination of the bottle. It possessed an irresistible charm for him ; and it was no uncommon thing for him to neglect business of the utmost importance in order to indulge in a carouse.

One day, in the merry month of May, Clara arrived from Hornsey. Mildred was delighted to see her, and regretted that she could give her no good news of John, who had been tipsy twice in one week. Varney Vaillant had become the familiar friend, and in such a specious way did he talk to the young wife that she began to think that she had formed a wrong estimate of his character, and that he was an angel of light to what she had supposed him to be.

He represented himself as her husband's friend, and said that he kept him out of much mischief. He added that John sought him rather than being sought. "What, my dear madam," he would often say, "have I to hope from your husband? I have done much for him, and would do more ; but it makes my heart bleed to see you so badly treated. We really must put a stop to the way in which he goes on ; for if he neglects his business as he does at present he will soon be in-

volved in the deepest poverty. Rely upon my best exertions in yours and his behalf."

At this she would dry her tears and thank him enthusiastically, and he would think her more lovely than ever.

It was evening. Ten o'clock had struck, and John had not come home. Clara and Leonard were sitting side by side, talking to one another in that artless and engaging tone so peculiarly entrancing to lovers. Mildred was by herself near the window. Her head was resting on her hand. She had assumed an attitude of deep thought; but whenever a footstep sounded in the road, or a cab rolled by, she started and breathed heavily with excitement and anxiety. Occasionally she put her hand to her side, as if her heart was palpitating violently, and then she heaved a sigh so deep, so exhaustive, that her very soul seemed to issue with it.

And, oh! how wan was her cheek!—how wretched her aspect!—how sunken her eyes!

Could he look at her in his sober moments, and not feel a pang of remorse shoot through him like a fiery dart?

In his sober moments he was kind and good, and penitent and gentle. It was only when his besetting sin overcame him—the sin of father and the sin of son—that he was deaf to the voice of reason, and his wife's evident grief did not affect him.

The apartment was handsomely furnished; for John's taste was undeniable. It was admitted on all



hands that he was an excellent judge of what was chaste and elegant. But what was the beauty of the furniture, and the handsomeness of the apartment, to Mildred ?

She would have infinitely preferred to live with her husband, sober, in a garret, than with him, intoxicated, in a palace.

A sharp rat-a-tat-tat, and a violent ring, preceded by the sudden stoppage of a cab.

"It is he !" cried Mildred, springing to her feet. "Will you go, Leonard ? I dread to see him !—it is positive torture to me ; and I don't feel very well to-night. Go, dear Leonard, will you ? and if he's violent, try—try to soothe him !"

"I will manage him as well as I can," replied Leonard ; "do you sit down."

"Pray don't excite him ; it only makes him worse," she said.

"Leave him to me," was Leonard's reply, as he went to the door.

The servant already opened it, admitting John Milington and Varney Vaillant. Melancholy to relate, John was in a state of intoxication ; but his polished, wary, and circumspect friend was as perfectly sober as any judge who ever sat on the bench.

"Why, John, my man ; stand up, stand up," exclaimed Leonard, as his brother stumbled over the mat, in the passage.

"Leave me 'lone," replied John, pushing past him and entering the drawing-room.

Fortunately, an arm-chair was handy, and he fell into it. He had the stump of a cigar between his lips, for he had lately become a smoker, and was redolent of wine and smoke.

"Very sad," said Varney Vaillant, to Leonard, as they hurried John into the room. "I have done my best to check him, but when the appetite for drink lays hold of him, he's beyond control. Very sad, very sad indeed!"

"It is very sad," replied the brother, looking at the Frenchman with his keen, vigilant, rather grey eyes; "but mind you this, sir, I don't hold you altogether guiltless of the present state of things."

"Me!" ejaculated John's particular friend; "why, my dear fellow, you talk nonsense! What interest have I in making your brother tipsy? I only brought him home to-night out of a feeling of pure friendship. I found him as you see him now, in a public thoroughfare, and seeing that he had some jewellery about him, and knowing that Mrs. Millington would be greatly alarmed at his absence, I sacrificed my engagements, put him in a cab, and, here he is. I must really beg of you to be a little more thoughtful before you make allegations which you cannot substantiate.

Leonard made no reply. They reached the drawing-room. Neither Clara or Mrs. Millington had risen. John was breathing heavily; his hands had fallen powerless by his side, and his mouth was open, his cravat awry, his hair rough and tangled, his hat and waistcoat stained with wine. Who could regard him

without an exclamation of profound abhorrence?

"I bring you your husband as I found him, Mrs. Millington," said Mr. Vaillant, "and I hope you will at least give me credit for good intentions. I take this opportunity, once for all, to declare that I will have nothing whatever to do with him again. It has been my good fortune, once or twice, to step in and take him from the worst company that he could fall into. I say no more."

The mysterious language of Varney Vaillant increased Mildred's grief. She knew not what to think—knew not what to fear.

John was becoming worse and worse.

Mrs. Millington came to regard Vaillant as her husband's friend. His influence over him was undoubted; and she would frequently pour out her heart to him in her hour of tribulation, and lament the course John was taking. Whenever this happened, it was noticeable that Varney invariably sympathized with the beautiful young wife, and never lost an opportunity of making some remark, or throwing out some insinuation, which was prejudicial to his friend.

It appeared that he was desirous of inflaming Mildred's anger against her husband, or wished to make him look contemptible in her eyes.

Affairs continued in the same state for nearly a year. Millington became intoxicated periodically, though he did not make himself an habitual drunkard. Vaillant was the friend of both husband and wife. The one he incited to drink, the other he prejudiced against the

former, whom he represented as being worse than he really was. In a word, he employed himself in the congenial occupation of heaping fuel upon the fire.

An event that should have sobered John, if anything could, occurred during this year: Mrs. Millington became a mother. John was proud of his child, which, being a boy, was christened after him; and he set to work for a time with great energy; and when asked why he was more industrious than usual, he replied that he had a family, and it was necessary to lay in something for a rainy day.

For fully a month, Mr. Lovibond, and all John's friends, were convinced that he had turned over a new leaf. Their sanguine expectations were, however, disappointed; he fell into the habit of dram drinking, thinking thereby to avoid the evil of intoxication. For instance, instead of sitting down and drinking a bottle of wine, he would leave his office a dozen times a day, and get a small glass of spirits at a neighbouring tavern. This stimulated his appetite for spirituous liquors and inflamed him to sometimes an almost ungovernable pitch.

Leonard and Clara were, as usual, together near the piano, indulging in a quiet, subdued conversation, after the manner of lovers. Mr. Vaillant had dropped in for an hour, as was his frequent custom. Mildred and he were talking together, chiefly about John, whose conduct he did not absolutely condemn; but by throwing out insidious insinuations, endeavoured to make him ridiculous and contemptible in his wife's eyes.

"You are much to be pitied, my dear Mrs. Millington," he exclaimed, in a tone of commiseration. "So good, so dutiful, so loving and affectionate a wife—so beautiful and so accomplished,—ought to meet with a better fate. I declare that I am perfectly sickened and disgusted sometimes with your husband, when he has been drinking. He will make himself the laughing-stock of a dozen people."

Mildred reddened. Her husband's shame was made her own.

"He lays himself, as it were, upon the tongues of the vulgar, and they mock him. Ah, what an invaluable help-mate you would make for a steady and deserving man !"

"We are all creatures of circumstances," returned Mildred. "Marriage, as you know, is a lottery ; and I firmly believe there are many worse husbands than mine. Dear me ! how late it is getting. I wish he would come home. I cannot help being anxious about him."

"Most likely he is playing billiards somewhere, or amusing himself at a music-hall. As I walked along Pall Mall to-night I made sure I saw him, and I should have spoken to the person, whoever he was, had I not seen a lady hanging upon his arm."

"Oh, no, no ! you must have been mistaken ; it could not have been John," returned Mrs. Millington, hastily, pressing her hand to her side, as if a sharp pain had shot through her heart.

At this moment a loud and heavy knock was heard

at the door. Mildred's heart leapt into her mouth, for she knew it was his knock.

In an instant the door was opened, and John strode in. Going to the bell, he rang for some glasses, and began to drink some brandy and water, much to Mildred's consternation.

As John continued to drink, he became noisy, and excited his wife's serious apprehensions; and although he had expressed his determination not to go out again, he now prepared to do so.

"Don't go out again, John, dear!" exclaimed Mildred.

"I tell you all, I will go," cried Millington, losing all control over himself. "Am I a child, that I cannot take care of myself? I will be master in my own house! I have been made a fool of, long enough?"

Mildred looked at Vaillant as if she would ask him to come forward and exert his powerful influence in her behalf. He interpreted her glances rightly, and at once advanced.

"I think you had better not go out," he exclaimed.

"Perhaps, sir, you will have the kindness to mind your own business!" replied John, with cold sarcasm.

"It is my business, since I have made it so!" said the other, biting his lips.

"I shall do as I like in my own house! It is my pleasure to go out, and I should like to see any one prevent me!"

Vaillant turned away, with a shrug of the shoul-

ders ; in another moment, he walked out of the room, and was gone.

"Oh, go after him some one," cried Mildred. "I know not why, but I feel assured that something dreadful will happen to him this night."

And, falling back into her chair, she sobbed violently.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A CHIVALROUS INTERFERENCE WITH THE PLCE ENDS DISASTROUSLY.

VAILLANT hastily put his hat on his head, and rushed from the house. The fog was clearing off, and the moon could be faintly seen in the heavens; but though he looked right and left, he could discover no trace whatever of him for whom he was searching.

He walked up and down in different directions, and even penetrated as far as the main road, without success; and giving the chase up, returned to High Park Terrace, to impart the bad news to the sorrowing wife.

Mildred had a strong conviction that something would happen. The idea was so firmly implanted in her mind that it was found impossible to eradicate it.

Both Leonard and Clara did their best to console and assure her that John would be back as soon as the public-houses closed ; but, like Rachel, weeping for

her children, she would not be comforted.

He had not gone far down the main road, before he heard cries and harsh exclamations.

Two policemen were dragging a poor flower girl along the road, and it was at once apparent to all that the constables were using much more force than was absolutely necessary. Indeed their conduct might be described as brutal in the extreme.

The girl's dress was torn from the gathers, and the flowers she still continued to hold in her hand, were crushed and spoilt. Her cries were heartrending, and well calculated to work upon so excitable a man as John, more especially when under the influence of liquor.

"I can't stand that. It makes my blood boil," cried he.

John Millington strode after the policemen. The flower-girl saw him coming, and said, "Help me, dear gentleman; I have done nothing, and these men are tearing me to pieces. I'll go quietly enough, but they won't let me. Help! help!"

What has this girl done?" sternly demanded John, clenching his fists, and stopping right in front of the officers.

"I don't see that you have anything to do with her or us either," responded the policeman.

"I ask you my good man, what she has done, and why you are dragging her in this brutal manner to the station-house?"

"We're not bound to answer you. You are not an



inspector, and you had better move on, or we'll take you with her for hindering us in the execution of our duty."

"Oh, yes," said the other constable; "if the gentleman wants a night's lodging, we can accommodate him."

"Take that, you insolent ruffian!" cried John, drawing his elbow well back, and hitting straight from the shoulder.

The man was struck on the temple, and fell like a stone. His companion was about to draw his staff, but John stopped him, for he sent him rolling over and over like a log, till he lay still in the gutter.

Both policemen were temporarily stunned. John took advantage of the opportunity; and, giving the flower girl some money, said, "Take that my child, and run away. I'll prevent these hounds from following you."

"Heaven bless you, sir!" replied the girl, pocketing the coin. "Take these flowers, they are all I have to offer you. They're not worth much now," she added, looking at their faded and crushed appearance; "but I'll give you some fine ones some day."

The police began to recover themselves, and the girl, seeing this, ran off at the top of her speed.

John clenched his fists again; and not a whit intimidated, advanced to the combat; but the police, mindful of former favours, cut the fray short by striking him on the head and felling him like an ox.

He lay upon the ground, insensible with a severe

wound and cut head. One policeman stood over him as a guard, with his staff, while the other ran to the station-house for a stretcher.

When the stretcher came John was lifted into it, strapped down, and carried to the station-house. The divisional surgeon was at once summoned, and dressed his wound, which was not serious. When he was well enough the charge was taken, and his name figured on the charge-sheet, as having, when in a state of intoxication, violently assaulted the police in the execution of their duty, and rescued a prisoner from custody.

The police are no respecters of persons. John was cast into a cell with characters of the worst description. Fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be, he was not sober enough to know in what distinguished company he was, and he was soon sound asleep, huddled up in the corner of his cell.

Midnight came, and with it no husband to the house in High Park Terrace. Mildred was in despair, Clara timid and nervous, Leonard and Vaillant both uneasy and indignant.

"His conduct is very bad," said Leonard. "There is positively no excuse for it."

"You are right," replied Varney; "he deserves the severest reprobation. I cannot defend him in any way."

"May I trespass once more upon your kindness?" exclaimed Mildred.

"Certainly. Pray command me."

"I am sadly afraid something has happened to my unfortunate husband. Will you walk down to the police-station, and make inquiries?"

"With pleasure. I shall be glad to do anything to alleviate your anxiety."

Leonard remained at home. Mildred was overwhelmed with grief and trouble. At half-past eleven the nurse had come down stairs to say that the baby was very ill and restless, and it was feared that it would be necessary to send for the doctor.

Mr. Vaillant reached the police-station after a brisk walk of ten minutes' duration, and tapped with his knuckles at the closed door. It was opened to him by a constable, and he was admitted when his business was known. In answer to his questions, the inspector on duty replied, "A gentleman, answering the description given, was admitted nearly an hour and a half ago, charged with violently assaulting the police, and rescuing a prisoner from lawful custody."

Thanking the inspector in a quiet tone of voice, he went away, muttering, "I am sorry for his wife! She is too beautiful to suffer!"

It was no pleasant task, that, which had fallen to the lot of Mr. Vaillant. He had to inform a young wife, late at night, after the clock had struck twelve, that the man of her choice, whom she loved to adoration, had been placed under lock and key by the parish constables, for the offence of breaking her Majesty's peace.

Yet there was no help for him. The news must be-

come hers, sooner or later. Certainty is at all times better than suspense. The heart may be stricken as with a sudden palsy, or a lightning-like paralysis, but it knows the extent of its misery, and it can gauge the depth of its misfortune.

There was a smile almost triumphant upon the Frenchman's lips as he retraced his steps to High Park Terrace. His peculiarly expressive countenance gleamed with subdued pleasure. While he sympathized with the unhappy wife, he seemed to think John's present misfortune a future gain for him.

He was inscrutable. It was not only difficult, but impossible, to read him. He veiled his thoughts with such care, that he appeared the most innocent of mortals, while, in reality, he was eternally occupied with schemes, plots, and doubtful enterprises.

Leonard opened the door for him, for the servant had been sent to bed. It was deemed advisable to prevent her hearing any conversation that might take place, for a local scandal is easily created.

"What news?" asked Leonard. "Have you seen John?"

"I am sorry to say, I have," was the reply.

"Sorry!—and why?"

"Because your brother is in the hands of the police. Stay; do not be excited. I do not wish to alarm his loving wife. It is a very sad and shocking thing; but he has assaulted the police, and I am afraid it will go hardly with him."

Leonard was a brave and a strong man. He re-

ceived this disastrous intelligence without any outward and visible sign of emotion. His first thought was how to break it to Mildred. It was apparent at once that she must be told precisely what had happened; and requesting the bearer of the sad news to follow him, led the way into the drawing-room. Mildred was lying on a sofa. Clara was bending over her, with all the tender affection of a kind and considerate sister, and bathing her forehead with Cologne-water.

The young wife raised herself up when she heard footsteps, and looked inquiringly at Mr. Vaillant.

"Have you found my husband?" she asked, while her frame trembled with anxious expectation.

"It is useless to disguise the fact," exclaimed Leonard; "and, therefore, I tell you the truth at once."

"Yes, yes—the truth—tell me the truth," she gasped.

"My brother has, as I dreaded, made a fool of himself—fought the police, and been locked up in a police cell."

Mildred said nothing. She fell back again, closed her eyes, wrapt herself up in her great grief, and wept bitterly.

The other inmates of the room preserved a discreet silence, for they respected her sorrow. Varney Vaillant soon took his leave, promising to call early in the morning, and bring a solicitor well-versed in the practice of the police-courts with him. Clara sat by Mil-

dred's side, and endeavoured to comfort her as well as she could, but the only reply she was able to elicit was a deep-drawn sigh or a weary moan.

Leonard paced up and down the room, with his arms folded. He was much annoyed at what had happened. A heavy disgrace was about to fall upon his family name. It was not a great name. It was not allied to a noble race, nor distinguished in the annals of his country; but it was respectable. It was his pride to think that it was so, but its respectability was about to vanish into thin air, and to be cast to the winds, by the publicity given to an odious and disgraceful police report.

After the lapse of an hour, with great difficulty Leonard and Clara induced Mildred to go to bed, who retired, but not to sleep; and when morning came her eyes were red, she looked hot and feverish, and in appearance haggard and woe-begone in the extreme. Her husband would be fined and admonished, but his name would be in the papers, and he would be known to the police.

The assault was clearly proved, and John committed for seven days.

Millington was so stupefied on hearing this judicial decree, that he had to cling to the rails of the dock to prevent himself from falling. To be cast into prison—to be herded with ruffians of every description—was more than he could bear. His equanimity deserted him, and his fortitude vanished.

It was in vain that his legal adviser rose to protest

against the sentence, and to appeal for a mitigation of it. The magistrate would not listen to him ; and he had to sit down, conscious of defeat, but also conscious of having done his best to earn his fee.

John was not allowed to speak to his friends. He was hurried below by the gaoler, and placed in a cell, to await the coming of the prison van. Mr. Scott shook hands with Leonard, and the latter hurried away, to carry his dismal tidings to High Park Terrace.

When he reached the drawing-room, he promptly told the truth, saying, "It is all over ! John is sent to prison for a week !"

Mildred uttered a piercing scream, and fainted. This last shock was too much for her overwrought nerves, and she succumbed beneath it. Having laid her on the sofa, Clara sat by her side, anxiously watching, in deep thought.

"Poor thing !" said Leonard. "I am very, very sorry for her ! Oh, my brother ! could you but see your folly ! It is sad for one so young to be tried so cruelly !"

"It is, indeed !" replied Clara, gravely. "Your brother has much to answer for !"

And so he had. But instead of proving a wholesome discipline to him, his committal to gaol only made him callous and morose. He had much time to reflect while picking the oakum that was given him ; and the ignominious work, bread and water, and close confinement, together with their surroundings, soured his temper, and hardened him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. LOVIBOND DIES.—LEONARD GOES ABROAD.—JOHN  
MILLINGTON FALLS INTO DIFFICULTIES.

A WEEK is but a week. Circumstances make it appear longer or shorter than it really is ; but it nevertheless consists of so many hours, and so many minutes, neither of which can be augmented or diminished. John's week passed over his head. The prison opened its gates, and he was discharged.

He felt ashamed to go home at first, dreading the averted looks of Leonard, and the reproaches of his wife.

Mildred's meek and peaceful manner, however, completely disarmed him. She did not utter one reproachful word. She knew how much he must have suffered, for she judged his grief by the depth of her own ; and her heart was full of soft affection and loving kindness for him.

"My own, dear, dear husband!" she exclaimed, flinging her arms joyfully round his neck ; "at last you are restored to me!"

"I—I thought you would be angry with me," he stammered, confusedly.

"No, my love," she answered, solemnly. "If all the world deserted, you, yet would not I. When you are miserable and in misfortune, I feel it my bounden duty to cling closer to you. Did we not take one another at the holy altar for better, for worse ; and shall



I be justified in considering myself released from my vows, simply because the compact now and then turns out for the worse ?”

“Bless you, Mildred ! This is kind—more than I deserve ; and, I am sure, more than I expected,” he said, affected to tears.

“You are naturally good, and brave, and clever,” she continued, her eyes flashing with a hopeful fire. “It is only when your evil genius gains the upper hand, and you fall under its influence, that you slide back. Be strong—be courageous, my own—and resist your besetting sin, and you can once more hold up your head amongst your fellow-men. I am sanguine—I believe in your future, and your capability for triumphing over your enemies—redeeming one false step by a long life of good and exemplary conduct.”

John smiled, and kissing his young wife, promised amendment, as he had promised it a score of times before ; and she believed him.

His business, as a matter of course, suffered to some extent by the publicity which had been given to his name in the newspapers. For a time, he found himself unenviably notorious ; but some of his friends adhered to him, notably Varney Vaillant, and he did not suffer so much in a pecuniary sense as he had anticipated.

Mr. Lovibond had been ailing for some time, and the news of John’s committal to prison for a drunken assault on the police did not tend to improve his condition. He at length came to recognise the fact that

he was dying ; and no sooner did he know that his last hours were inevitably approaching, than the good and holy man exclaimed, "Thy will be done !" John and Mildred, together with Clara, were with him to the last. He exhorted them to pursue the straight and narrow path which leads to everlasting bliss, and died, blessing his children, as he termed them.

He made a will ; and when it was read by his sorrowing relations, it was discovered that he had left his little wealth to Mildred and to Clara. It was to be divided equally between them. John found Mildred's share a welcome addition to his income ; for his bad and dissolute habits had made him feel the want, and recognise the value, of money.

They buried him in Hornsey Churchyard—raising a simple but pretty monument to his memory, upon which was engraved a pious and appropriate inscription.

Soon after this melancholy event took place, Leonard's employers determined upon sending him abroad. This did not take his friends by surprise ; for the subject had been talked about for some time before the event took place.

It was an extremely advantageous arrangement for him, because his employers allowed him to trade to a certain extent upon his own account. He was to go to Oporto, and negotiate sales and purchases in the wine trade. He would have ample opportunity for studying the character of the people, and the resources of the country, all which would be of use to him in his future dealings with them.

Mildred was sorry to part with Leonard, who had always been a kind and consistent friend to her. His advice, in certain emergencies, was invaluable ; and his presence was some check, however slight, upon the vagaries of his brother John.

Clara, of course, felt the parting most keenly, for she loved him affectionately—fondly. He promised to correspond with her regularly and frequently, and comforted her with the promise of a speedy return.

The parting between the brothers was also sad. John loved Leonard, and was sorry that he was going to a climate, never, at the best of times, too healthy. Clara threw herself upon his neck, and wept. Mildred also shed tears, out of sympathy. Leonard was calmer and braver. He did not feel the acute bitterness of the separation until he was on board the ship which was to carry him to his destination in a foreign land.

Then, in the solitude of the cabin, and in the silence of the night, he poured out his heart and confessed his weakness.

“Be careful, John!” he exclaimed, before his departure, holding his brother’s hand in his. “I entrust my future wife in your charge. I am sure that I may rely upon you. When you feel inclined to give way to bad habits, restrain the inclination, and reflect that two helpless women are dependent upon you for protection and support. Think of me—think of them, and curb the tempter with a hand of iron!”

“I will do my best. No harm shall come to Clara,”

replied John, adding, with a manly pride, "I can be strong if I will it ; and I must not allow you to climb up the ladder before me."

"In the race of life, the goal is not always for the swift ; the tortoise is as likely to win as the hare," replied Leonard.

Taking an affectionate leave of them all, he tore himself away, and went upon his mission, with hope and honest determination, joining hands in his heart.

For some days Clara was inconsolable ; but her innate sense of duty and propriety assisted her to overcome her grief. She was now living with the Millingtons ; and Mildred found her a great help, and a most agreeable companion, during her hours of solitude.

It is melancholy to relate that John relapsed. In spite of all his promises, his vows, his protestations and resolutions, he became a thorough Bacchanal.

He omitted to take money, when he could have done so ; neglected chances innumerable ; and positively, as it were, turned orders away from his door.

The consequences of this course of conduct were soon apparent. He had to live upon principal ; and his own and his wife's little fortunes were dissipated, like chaff before the wind, at the bar of the tavern, and in the billiard-room.

He continued to play, and to lose ; and considered the society of agreeable friends, and the amusement he derived from frittering away his time, at an alluring game, cheaply purchased at the price he paid for it.

This state of things could not continue for long

without bearing its natural fruit. He became embarrassed, and knew not where to obtain money to pay his tradesmen. The burden of this annoyance fell upon Mildred, who was more at home than himself, and who had consequently, to bear the brunt of the attacks which were made upon her husband's purse.

Two o'clock in the morning was his usual hour of arriving home, frequently intoxicated. He would not rise until twelve in the day; and then, after breakfasting and dining, he would once more start off to his old haunts, leaving his wife to bemoan his absence, and pray for his reformation.

Shortly after Leonard's departure for Oporto, a second child, a girl, was born. This should have steadied him; but it had not that effect. He became more reckless, and a greater wanderer than ever. Had it not been for Clara, and her incessant and unwearying kindness, Mildred must have sunk under the heavy weight of her affliction.

"I want some money," John abruptly exclaimed, one morning, after a carouse.

It was nearly one o'clock, and Mildred was nursing her infant. Clara had gone out to purchase something for dinner. The credit of the Millingtons was so bad in the neighbourhood, that they could obtain nothing without paying for it; so Clara went to various shops, on the ready-money principle, and did the best she could.

"You know very well, John, that I have none," replied Mildred, calmly; "a husband should not look to

his wife for money. Why distress me, and speak so harshly?"

"I must have some money," reiterated John, "for I have a debt to pay to-day."

"You have many debts to pay here, but those don't seem to trouble you."

"A tradesman's debt is not a debt of honour," he replied.

"If not, it ought to be; to obtain goods without paying for them is clearly dishonourable," said Mildred, boldly. "Oh, John! if you would only give up your present habits and lead a different life, what would I not give!" she added, pathetically. "Why not pay a little attention to your home and your profession. Cannot you see what looms in the distance; if you cannot, I can. There is nothing before us but ruin, starvation, and a debtor's prison, unless you reform."

John looked uncomfortable, but replied evasively to his wife, by saying, "If you have no money, Clara has. Ask her for some. Say it is for yourself."

"Is it possible that you ask me to tell a falsehood, in order to supply you with the means of carrying on your dissipation?" Mildred cried, indignantly.

"I tell you I want some money," he said, in a humble tone.

"Go to your dissolute companions, and borrow it. I am surprised that you have not got more manly feeling than to come to us. Clara has but little, upon which we and your children are dependant for our daily bread, since you will not work to keep us."

Finding that nothing was to be expected from his wife or Clara, he sullenly took his departure, and walked through Chelsea, into town, but could not conceal from himself that his character was that of a mean-spirited and despicable man. There was an absolute necessity for doing something—for money he must have; so he went to his offices, in Craven Street, for the rent of which his landlord was pressing him, and taking up a half-finished plan, which should have been sent home at least a month ago, endeavoured to complete it.

His hand was so tremulous that he was unable to hold either pen or pencil so as to draw with any accuracy, so he abandoned the attempt. He had a dislike to his work now, and positively panted to be in the billiard-room, where he could smoke, imbibe, and talk to those who, in his sober moments, were not worthy to tie his shoe-strings.

Yes, vice is a sad leveller. Misfortune brings one acquainted with strange bedfellows; and drink usually degrades a man to rags and the gutter.

Putting on his hat with a jerk, he was about to leave the office, when a knock was heard at the door, and the clerk admitted Mr. Vaillant who was well-dressed as usual, and the pink of fashion and politeness.

“My dear Millington,” he exclaimed, “you make yourself quite a stranger; your friends are at a loss to know in what out-of-the-way place you have been hiding. How is it that you avoid the haunts of men?”

A brilliant idea occurred to John. Perhaps he could place his acquaintance under contribution. He had never put his friendship to a practical test, but he would do so now ; at best, the Frenchman could but refuse him.

"To tell you the truth," said he, "I have been compelled to keep in the shade rather more than is agreeable to me lately ; I am badly in want of money."

"Is that a good and sufficient reason why you should desert your friends, and hide your light under a bushel?" replied Vaillant, elevating his eyebrows.

"If that is not—what is?"

"You talk my friend like a man who is under the influence of the moon," answered the other, with a light laugh. "You want money, and because you cannot get it, you go and hide your head in the sand, like an ostrich. Did any one ever hear of anything so preposterous!"

"I cannot see anything absurd in it," said John, ruefully, fully expecting a flat and decided refusal.

The Frenchman's manner was sarcastic, and not encouraging, though the expression of his face was good-humoured enough.

"You have friends, have you not?" resumed Varney Vaillant, after a pause.

"I have reason to believe that you are my friend," John replied, making use of that subtle species of flattery which is never absent from a borrower.



"Well, let us take that fact for granted, and begin upon it. If I am your friend, and you wanted assistance, why did you not come to me for it?"

"I did not care about trespassing on your kindness."

"That is a sort of pride which you did wrong to encourage," said the Frenchman. "I am not a friend of to-day, or of yesterday; and if you had reflected a moment, you would have known that I was at your service. I have a cheque in my pocket-book—tell me the amount you stand in need of?"

"A hundred pounds," replied John, who was scarcely able to contain his joy at this unexpected piece of good luck.

"Only that!—a mere trifle. Have I your permission to use your pen and ink?"

"Certainly."

Mr. Varney Vailiant sat down, and, taking a cheque from his pocket-book, unfolded it; filled it up, and handed it to John, who read it eagerly.

"A hundred and fifty!" he exclaimed; "that is more!"

"It is slightly in excess of the moderate sum you mentioned," returned the Frenchman, apologetically. "But you must excuse my rudeness in making it so. You will find a use for the surplus, I don't doubt. Make your wife some present—or take your family to Brighton for a week. I go there to-morrow."

John thanked his benefactor profusely, and walked a little way with him.

They entered a bank in St. James's Square, where the cheque was cashed. He asked Vaillant if he did not want an acknowledgment of the loan.

"Certainly not," was the prompt reply. "That sort of thing is altogether unnecessary amongst gentlemen."

Generous as he was though, the Frenchman was wary enough to make the cheque payable to "order," and not to "bearer," which, of course, necessitated an endorsement on the back, and perhaps he knew that this was sufficient to found an action upon in a court of law.

John went to a billiard-room where he stayed all night ; and when the pale, sickly, grey light of morning struggled in through the half-closed shutters, he had not a penny.

It was early morning when he reached his own door.

People were astir, and business had already commenced.

On approaching the house, a shabbily-dressed man, crouching in the corner of a doorway, exclaimed to John, "A nice morning, sir ! You are up early !" he said, with a grin.

"So are you, for the matter of that ;" replied the other, with a hiccup.

"Is your name Millington—Mr. John Millington, sir ?" asked the shabby-genteel man.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Arkitek ?"

"Yes."

"Then I have much pleasure in serving you with a writ, at the suit of Mr. Thomas Jenkins, butcher, in the Fulham Road."

"Eh!—what?" cried John, bewildered.

"Full partiklars to be found inside, sir;" replied the man, with a still wider grin.

"You rascal! I'll break every bone in your skin!"

"No, you, won't, sir! Not this time, sir! Oh, no, sir?" said the process-server, moving off, and rapidly disappearing in the distance.

When the servant opened the door, he entered, holding the writ in his hand. Mildred, who was always an early riser, but who, truth to tell, had not retired to rest all that night, met him in the passage.

"What is the matter?" she cried, in alarm. "How fearfully wild you look!"

"Enough to make me!" he replied, brandishing the writ before her.

"What is that?"

"A writ! A writ I have just been served with, at the suit of some tradesman or other!"

"What is to become of us?" sighed his wife, looking at the piece of paper, and seeing that the amount exceeded thirty pounds.

"It is useless to ask me," replied John, throwing himself into a chair. "The fact is, I am an idiot. How my head aches! Let me go to bed, and when I am refreshed, I will talk to you."

He rose, and his gait was so unsteady, that Mildred

had to support him as he walked. A long sleep refreshed him. When he awoke, he remembered all that had taken place, and he blamed himself for his folly, a thousand times over.

"What will you say, Mildred, when I tell you that yesterday evening I had a hundred pounds in my possession?" he exclaimed.

"If you had it now, it would be most welcome. I have a thousand uses for it," she replied.

"So it would; and I dare say you have; but I gambled it away last night!" said the conscience-stricken man. "Upon my word, Mildred, I wonder you don't hate me!"

"I can never hate my husband!" she said, grandly.

"Never?"

"Under no circumstances whatever. I may pity him; but my pity is the offspring and companion of love."

He looked at her with admiration.

"You will, perhaps, ask me where I obtained so large a sum of money?" he continued. "I borrowed it from my friend, Varney."

"Indeed! Did he lend it you freely?"

"With alacrity."

"He is, indeed, a friend!" said Mildred.

"I found him so on that occasion. I had a gambling debt to pay, and met him when I was bemoaning my inability to do so; he lent me the amount in a moment, without waiting to be asked."

"Perhaps he may be induced to do so again," suggested Mildred.

"You must ask him, then, for I have not courage enough to do it."

"I will ask him, with pleasure. Anything is better than having you made a bankrupt, dear John, for the sake of a paltry bill. Shall I write to his club, and ask him to call?"

"That will be a good plan, I think. I will go out for a stroll afterwards, and leave you together."

This matter was no sooner arranged, than Millington wrote to Varney Vaillant, requesting his company on the 10th inst. The next day a reply was received, accepting the invitation.

John could not ask favours; and whenever he resolved to do so, his moral courage oozed out at his fingers' ends. He would have resented an insult, and have fought till he dropped with exhaustion; but he could not summon up resolution enough to ask a friend to lend him fifty pounds, or tell a tradesman that he was unable to settle his little account until after quarter-day.

These things he left to his wife, who was heroine sufficient to go through them, and, in the main, satisfactorily. Having no funds, and not knowing where to get any, John spent a few days at home. He was not easy in his mind; he knew that if no appearance was put into the writ, judgment would be signed in eight days, and he would be incarcerated in default of payment.

Although he was testy and ill-tempered at times, his devoted wife was charmed at having him at home, and

her delight was soon apparent in her improved appearance. He played with his children, talked to Clara, and home once more assumed its wonted aspect. When the evening appointed for Mr. Vaillant's visit arrived, in the course of conversation, Mildred said, "I am in some trouble, Mr. Vaillant ; and I want you, with your usual kindness, to help me out of it."

"If it is in the power of mortal man to do so, you may rely upon it being done," he answered, watching her eagerly, with his glistening, snake-like eyes.

She pushed the writ over to him, and said, "That is my trouble."

Mr. Vaillant smiled as he took up the writ and read it. Then looking at Mildred, exclaimed, "I have expected that you would be annoyed in this way for some time past. The careless way in which your husband conducts his business, and the very negligent manner in which his home affairs must be managed, could not possibly result in anything else. You have my deep sympathy ; and if I can relieve your anxiety by lending your husband enough to satisfy this writ, I will do so with the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you very much," Mildred said. "I know John will be very grateful to you as well as myself. He did not like to ask you a favour in person, because you have, he tells me, very lately been of service to him.

"Oh, that was a mere trifle ! I hope you will not mention it again. I am one of those men, Mrs. Milington, who believe in the existence of genuine friend

ship. I made your husband my friend some time ago, and will not desert him because he happens to be involved in a network of pecuniary difficulties. Misfortune proves friendship, and puts it to a practical test. Damon did not know the extent of his friend Pythias's devotion until the tyrant, Dionysius, condemned him to death, and Pythias took his place as an hostage, while Damon went to bid his wife and child an eternal adieu. Oh! that I had lived in those days! Oh, that I had seen Damon galloping against time to lay his head upon the block! That scene upon the scaffold, in Syracuse, was worth a life-time to witness."

Mildred looked at the Frenchman in admiration. She had had her ideas of friendship, and they entirely coincided with those he promulgated.

John had been conversing with Clara during this space. Mildred beckoned to him, and when he rather bashfully walked over to her, said, "I have asked Mr. Vaillant the favour you were so anxious about; and——"

"Why did you not speak to me yourself?" exclaimed Vaillant. "Your experience should have told you that I was not likely to refuse you."

John shook his hand gleefully, and said, "Very many thanks. I will repay you as soon——"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that! Make me your banker, at any time. I shall only be too proud to serve you, my dear friend."

He was as good as his word; but, instead of fifty

pounds, he sent a hundred. John insisted upon appropriating one-half of this to his own use ; and with it in his pocket, went to the billiard-room, feeling sure that, as he had been sober some time, he would be able to play judiciously, and win back some portion of what he had lost.

He played, with varying luck, till three o'clock in the morning ; at which time he went home.

For twelve months the same reckless course of conduct was pursued which had marked the greater portion of his married life.

Millington was eternally in debt, and threatened with arrest ; but when matters approached a climax, Varney Vaillant generously drew a draft upon his banker, and he was temporarily freed from his pressing liabilities.

He acquired the reputation of having drawn so largely upon his friend's resources as to have half-ruined him ; and there were malicious and mischievous people who had the hardihood and audacity to couple the Frenchmau's name and that of Mrs. Millington together in a way that John would not have liked had he heard it.

He little thought that, while he was ruining himself, and damaging his own character irretrievably, he was throwing a blight upon the spotless purity of his angel wife.

This would have stung him to the quick sooner than anything, if it is possible to move an habitual drunkard from his mad lethargy. It is easy to tire the best



friends by a persistent course of misconduct, and so John eventually found out.

On one occasion he had backed himself for a considerable sum to kill a certain number of pigeons with a given number of shots at some suburban place of resort for sporting men. He had no money to bet with, and, as usual, he sought his friend, Varney Vaillant, at his chambers.

During the past year he had become more confident in his manner. His address was bolder, and he wished to pass for a man about town, instead of being ambitious, as formerly, of being considered a quiet, steady, persevering, and hard-working man of business.

Varney Vaillant was wrapped in a handsome cashmere dressing-gown, and wore a velvet smoking-cap, with a long tassel. He had finished breakfast, and was smoking his accustomed cigar, and engaged in the perusal of the morning paper.

"How de do?" John exclaimed. "Glad to find you in. I want a cheque for a small amount."

"Then you decidedly won't have it, my slightly-impetuous friend," returned the Frenchman, quickly.

A look of blank amazement overspread John's face. It had never occurred to him as being within the range of possibilities that his goose could or would cease to lay him golden eggs.

Almost as soon would he have expected the argent moon to drop from her sphere, and be sold at so much a pound, in Bond Street, for green cheese.

"Not lend me any! Come, old fellow, you are joking!" he said, looking very much abashed and crestfallen.

"I beg your pardon," replied Varney Vaillant, laying down his newspaper. "I was never more in earnest."

"I am going to shoot some pigeons at the 'Wood,' and must have some money to bet with."

"I can't help that," was the obdurate answer.

"You cannot be in earnest. It is the first time you have refused me," urged John.

"I am perfectly well aware of that fact."

"I will pay you back again this afternoon. It is only a temporary want, and I am sure to win my match. I shall have plenty in a few hours."

"So you have said before," replied the Frenchman, in a cold and unresponsive manner.

"What have I done, that you should treat me like this?" John Millington asked, feeling much hurt, but more disappointed.

"Simply this! You have diminished my income at least one half since I had the good or bad luck to make your acquaintance. Why I have permitted this to be done is more than I can tell. My friends come to me and say, 'Why are you squandering large sums upon a worthless man, who will not work, and is going to the dogs?'"

"Who says so?" inquired John, fiercely.

"Oh, do not storm! I can refer you to our mutual acquaintance, Lord Mountturrett, who will, I have no doubt, be very ready to repeat the obnoxious phrase in your presence."

"Do you want to pick a quarrel with me, Varney?" John asked.

"I—why should I?" Varney Vaillant replied, in a tone of surprise. "Do I pick a quarrel with you when I refuse to lend you any money? If that is picking a quarrel with you, I suppose I am ambitious of doing so. Interpret my behaviour in your own way, and then there can be no cause of complaint—on your side, at least."

"Will you lend me twenty pounds?" asked John, doggedly.

"Frankly, no!"

"You will not?"

"No; nor yet one. Have I not already told you so? If it is a pleasure to you to listen to an emphatic and decided negative, why I shall be glad to oblige you."

"What am I to do?" John said, as if speaking to himself; and passing his hand over his brow, as if to collect his thoughts.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Set to work. Leave off drinking, and gambling, and late hours, and do what other men do when they want money—work—do you hear me?—work! What has heaven given you your talents for? Is it right to waste them in a tavern, or bury them in a pothouse? Work, Millington, is the panacea for your malady."

"I am too far gone for work," replied John, mournfully. "My practice is ruined. I have lost my con-

nexion. My landlord has let my offices over my head, and taken what furniture there was for rent."

"What of that? Do you blame him? Get other offices, and work your way up again. What matter if you have to toil up hill; better men than you have done it. They have begun at the bottom, and reached the summit."

"Will you lend me some money to begin again with?"

"No."

"Why?" asked John.

"Because I have no confidence in you," replied Varney Vaillant. "That is why, John Millington. At present, you are the slave of drink, and capable of doing a shabby thing."

"I did not come here to be insulted," John said rather angrily.

"I am not conscious of having insulted you," rejoined Vaillant. "If the truth is an insult, you had better not stop here, for you are likely to hear a good deal of it. I am in a didactic humour to-day. If my conversation is not to your mind, I do not wish to detain you."

"That is as much as to tell me to go?"

"Be your own interpreter, as I said before."

"I thought I had one friend," moaned John.

"So you have. I am more your friend now than I have ever been."

"No, No! None but my wife—not one in the wide world!"

Varney Vaillant walked up and down the room, as if in deep thought. John sat on a chair, his elbows resting on his knees, and his head upon his hands.

Suddenly stopping in front of him, the Frenchman, with a viperish glance, said, "Your wife has some jewellery, has she not?"

"She has," replied John, looking up. "Very handsome jewellery it is, too. Leonard made Clara some valuable presents before he went away, and left a few trinkets of his own; they are all together in a tin box, which is locked up in an *escritoir* in the drawing-room.

"You have kept your sacrilegious hands off that, at all events," said Varney Vaillant; adding, *sotto voce*, "It is more than Mrs. Millington had a right to expect."

"How do you mean! Do you think I would rob my wife?" said John, terrified.

"I have no very decided opinion about the matter," returned the Frenchman. "This I know; a man can't rob his wife. What the husband's is, the wife's is; and *vice versa*."

John looked at the clock on the mantelpiece, and saw, that if he would keep his appointment at the shooting ground, he must away at once.

He did not trouble himself to say good bye to Varney Vaillant; he had been treated ignominiously—so he thought—and he was in no humour to bandy empty commonplaces with any one.

The door slammed slowly behind him, and he

tramped slowly down-stairs with his hands in his pocket, and a dejected look upon his face. Never was disappointment more keen or unexpected.

When he reached home he was sober enough to let himself in with a latch-key, and that was all. His wife and Clara had gone to bed ; all was still and quiet.

Taking a light, which was left burning for him on the hall-table, he staggered into the sleeping-room, and ransacked the cheffonier for something to complete his intoxication.

He now bore some resemblance to a well-seasoned cask. It was not a glass, nor a dozen glasses that would overcome John. His annoyance was great when he could find nothing.

All at once, his eye rested upon the handsome escriptoir, which contained his wife's jewels. Varney Vailant's insidious remarks about them had rankled in his mind. They had sown there the germ of an idea which was fostered, and carefully tended, until it had acquired shape and consistency.

The Frenchman had distinctly told John that a man could not rob his wife. That was as much as to say, that though it was a moral offence, it was one the law could take no cognizance of.

If John Millington fell on his knees with a chisel or a carving-knife before that escriptoir, and broke it open, he could not be transported for the deed. He was, in a manner, taking his own.

It would be an excellent way of supplying his imme-

diate necessities ; for the diamonds, pearls, emeralds, and other precious stones, in their gold settings, would probably fetch him a couple of hundred pounds ; which, as times were hard with him, was a sum he could not afford to despise.

Why should he not have "his own?" What was to prevent him then and there from taking "his own?" His wife never wore the jewels. What good were they to her? If she went out to balls and parties, or visited the opera, the case would be different. But she did not. Her husband, by desolating her home, took care of that.

His evil genius was at John's elbow that night, and he resolved to make the jewels his own. Some apples happened to be on the sideboard, and on the dish a knife. This he made his weapon, and with it opened the escritoir. The box in which the jewels were placed was a common, japanned, tin box. It was unlocked. Mildred did not dread thieves, and was at all times averse to the protection of lock-and-key.

Opening the box with trembling fingers, John feasted his eyes upon the sparkling stones and the glittering gold. That diamond bracelet, with the large stone in the centre, he had given his wife on their wedding-day. That brooch, with the emeralds, and other stones of price, was the gift of Mr. Lovibond. The pearl necklace was an offering at the shrine of affection, by Leonard. That mass of shining turquoises had been presented by Clara ; and Mr. Varney Vaillant was the donor of a finely wrought, and very valuable gold

chain, which lay coiled up in a corner like an aureous serpent.

Plunging his hand into the box, John took out the jewels, and placed them in the pocket of his coat. He could not carry the box with him—that would betray him. Having taken all, even to a few loose stones, he closed the escritoir, and throwing himself on a sofa, went off into a heavy slumber.

He awoke early ; and conscious of the disgraceful act of which he had been guilty, was anxious to get out of the house before his wife could discover the loss of her jewels.

As he was looking about him, in an uncertain manner, Mrs. Millington came down stairs. Her face wore its usual sad expression ; any one who looked at her could tell that she was compelled daily to take up her cross. Not a word of reproach did she utter. Her tone was mild—even loving—as she said, “You were late last night, John.”

“I suppose I may come home when I like?” he growled.

“I do not endeavour to place any restraint upon your actions. The time has gone by when I had power to influence you for your good. I am glad I have found you this morning before you go out, for I wished to consult you about poor little Milly.”

“What is the matter with her?”

“I am sadly afraid that she is going to have the whooping-cough ; all the symptoms are indicative of



that epidemic, and Dr. Adams shares my apprehensions."

"Doctors are always alarmists," said John. "It suits their purpose to be so."

"Oh, no; let me contradict you!" exclaimed Mildred, "Dr. Adams is a good conscientious gentleman; and you are greatly mistaken if you think he would stoop to anything mean and discreditable."

"I don't want to hear anything about Dr. Adams," replied John, petulantly. "If the child is going to have a cough, it is only what all children have sooner or later. Why make a fuss about nothing."

"That I never do," said Mildred, who was more than half inclined to cry at the unfeeling manner of her husband. "Oh, John, if you only knew how your cruel words cut me to the heart, you would try and be kinder to me!"

"I can't help my nature. It is not natural to me to say soft things, and disguise my thoughts. I have the blunt manner of most of my countrymen. Don't cry; I didn't mean it."

"How can I help crying, John," sobbed Mildred; "when I have so much on my mind. You do not appear to let anything trouble you, but I have everything to think of. A letter came from the landlord yesterday, saying, that if the rent, which is more than six weeks overdue, is not paid directly, he will distrain. That, and little Milly's illness, are enough to——"

"I really wish you would hold your tongue," cried

John, "if you have nothing but disagreeables to inflict upon me. I can assure you, I have my own troubles."

For some minutes Mildred's tears fell fast, and nothing but her sobs and John's heavy breathing were heard. At that moment her miserable demeanour, and the wretched state of his once happy home, stirred up a little compassion in John's heart. Flinty as that heart was becoming, it yet had its soft places.

Mildred's tears fell upon one of those. Going to her, he kissed her tears away, and begged her to be calm. His entreaties had the desired effect.

"If you were only kind to me," she said, "I could bear anything."

The tearful face was raised to his; the dim and swollen eyes peered into his hopefully; the tiny hands were clasped prayerfully, and placed near his.

"Go to work once more, John," she continued. "You can easily make a hundred pounds in a few weeks, if you try. The doctor says if I could take dear little Milly to Brighton for a week or a fortnight, it would do her a world of good."

"Perhaps he is right."

"To tell you the truth, I wanted your permission to sell or pawn my jewels, they would——"

"What!" exclaimed John, trembling violently "pawn your jewels?"

"Yes, dear; we should be able to pay the rent and go to the seaside."

"No, no; I can't allow that," he said, recovering from his surprise by a violent effort.

"Only for a time, dear. See what good would result from it. You could work, and get them back again. Mr. Vaillant will get you something to do—he has often told me so. Come, dear John, be guided by me for once."

"I will think," John said, hesitatingly.

"Let me sell my diamond brooch," Mildred went on; "that will fetch something considerable. It is in the escritoir. I will take it out and show you."

"I don't want to see it," replied John, sharply.

"I thought you might have forgotten what it was like dear, it is so long since I wore it. You know we never go anywhere."

"I suppose you are going to reproach me with that now," he said.

"Reproach you! Do I ever reproach you?" she replied, with a sweet smile. "Let me take out the brooch—you can go somewhere with it, and bring back the money?"

"I tell you, no."

"Very well," Mildred answered, sadly, "I am sorry, for our little girl's sake."

"Get me some brandy and a cup of tea, and I will think over the matter," cried John, who was all this time standing between his wife and the tell-tale escritoir.

Mildred left the room to execute his order, and John sank back again on the sofa, intensely relieved at her absence. At one time he was tempted to replace the jewels, but his evil genius again stepped in, and

stopped the tide of repentance when it was nearly at its flood.

He drank the tea when it appeared, and took a quantity of brandy with it, after which he went out saying he would not be long. His mind was perturbed, and he walked into town to quiet it.

The door of a pawnbroker's shop in Piccadilly attracted his attention, and he turned in almost involuntarily.

As he did so Varney Vaillant caught sight of his retreating figure, and halted abruptly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "it's lucky I took my walks early to-day. I wonder what our spendthrift architect wants with his avuncular relative. Can he have acted on my hint, and taken his wife's jewels? I'll watch him."



## CHAPTER IX.

LANDLORDS WILL BE HARD-HEARTED WHEN TENANTS ARE  
IN ARREAR.

JOHN was perfectly unconscious of being watched by any one; he had gone into the front part of the shop, preferring that, as being more reputable than the little boxes or wooden partitions at the back, where poor people take their coats, blankets, and articles of domestic use and wearing apparel on Monday morning, and redeem them again on Saturday night.

He laid his jewellery upon the counter, and when a grey-headed old man came up to attend upon him, said he wanted to borrow a hundred pounds upon the articles before him, which he would deposit as security for the loan.

Varney Vaillant pretended to be admiring some watches in the window, but he was in reality looking through the polished plate glass, and watching John's proceedings.

He saw the broker examine every article with the greatest care and minuteness—he saw him test the gold with *aqua-fortis*—and he finally saw a sum of money and a ticket—partially written, and partially printed on—pushed over to John, who got up and took his leave.

What was his surprise to see Varney Vaillant standing outside, and smiling complacently upon him.

“Ah, my young friend!” exclaimed Varney Vaillant “you have been ‘picking up the worm,’ as your proverb says.”

“Ten o'clock is not so very early,” John replied.

“For you and me it is: for artisans, clerks, and those small fry it is not. What have you been doing?”

“Nothing!”

“Indeed! Is a jeweller's shop the best place to conduct that interesting operation in? Don't it require the passage of money from one to another, and the deposit of jewellery by the way?” added Varney

Vaillant, impudently. "What will you take for the voucher?"

John was confounded. He could not doubt that the Frenchman had witnessed the pledging of the jewellery, and that he had his own suspicions upon the matter.

"It would be more satisfactory to me," he said, setting him at defiance, "if you would have the kindness to mind your own business."

"Listen to me my juvenile delinquent!" cried Varney, holding up his finger threateningly. "You have, I am convinced, taken another and longer step in the path which leads to perdition. Among the jewels you have just parted with I recognised some little trifle I gave your wife in happier days than those she now enjoys."

"Well, what of it? If you gave it to Mrs Millington, it became my property, and I can do what I like with it."

"That is sound, special pleading; and the plea, as far as it goes, holds good!" returned Varney. "But while it avoids, it confesses. You have robbed your wife?"

"Suppose I have!" exclaimed John, goaded to desperation. "Was it not you who first put the idea into my head? If it had not been for you, I should never have thought of it."

"That is all very well; but I beg to deny it *in toto*. I may have made some remark about Mrs. Millington's jewels, but I only congratulated her upon having

them still in her possession. There is an Eastern fable, which says, that when Eblis was going up hill with a burden too heavy to bear, he shifted it on to another's shoulders. Allow me to repeat my former question, 'what will you take for the voucher?' "

John deliberated for a time, and at length came to the conclusion that the voucher he had in his pocket would be safer in Varney Vaillant's possession than his own. He might be chivalrous enough to take the jewels out of the broker's hands, and present them to his wife, so he handed the piece of cardboard to the Frenchman, and told him he might have it for the nominal sum of five pounds.

So it changed hands.

John went to play a game or two at billiards intending then to return home, and give his wife half of what he had, to do what she liked with.

Mr. Varney Vaillant went back to his chambers, ordered his phaeton, and drove to High Park Terrace, Fulham.

Mrs. Millington was at home, and was glad to see him. She received him in a loose morning wrapper, holding her eldest child—christened John, after his father,—by the hand. The child was now nearly three years old. He was a strong, healthy-looking boy, and much admired by the friends of the family.

Few of these friends knew Mildred's real position. They were sedulously kept in the dark by Mildred, who, on all occasions, screened her husband. That John drank at times, and drank deeply, was no secret;

but it was generally believed that he went to work every day, and did his best to maintain himself and his family.

"Pray, pardon me, Mrs. Millington," exclaimed Mr. Vaillant, "for making so unceremonious a visit. I have a little matter of importance to speak to you upon, and I trust that may be a sufficient excuse."

"Oh, do not apologise, Mr. Vaillant! You are so old and tried a friend, that a visit from you is at all times welcome," replied Mildred, with a smile. "Indeed, you have been so rarely of late, that you are a perfect stranger, comparatively. Sit down and take my boy on your knee. You know you are a favourite of his."

The Frenchman took up Master John, and, stroking his face with the back of his hand, told him he was a good boy—a statement which the young gentleman placed implicit credence in, and did not belie, for he remained very quiet, and played with his grown-up friend's watch-chain, as if he were a judge of such costly articles.

"Your husband called upon me yesterday, Mrs. Millington, and asked me to lend him some money," began Varney Vaillant. "I refused, for I saw that the sums I have already let him have done him no good. Indeed, it was mainly for your sake that I listened to his applications."

"I was not aware that he had borrowed from you," said Mildred, much surprised.

"Is it possible! If you did not receive the money



what can he have done with it? However, the cheques I have in my pocket will convince you that what I state is the truth."

As he spoke, he laid a bundle of cheques on the table. These he had received from his banker's, and they one and all bore John's signature upon the back.

"Oh, I do not doubt your word for an instant?"

"I know that. But just cast your eye over them, to oblige me."

"What a number!" she said. "Dear me! they represent quite a large sum!"

"How much do you suppose?"

"Some thousands, I am sure!"

"Seven thousand, five hundred pounds!"

Mildred was astounded. When she had recovered from her surprise, she exclaimed, looking steadfastly at Varney, "I am convinced you will believe me, Mr. Vaillant, when I tell you that I never had a penny of this money. What he can have done with it I can only guess. It must have been squandered at the gambling table."

"That is more than probable." replied Varney. But astonished as you are already, I am going to astonish you much more!"

"Really?" said Mildred, looking up anxiously.

"I was abroad early this morning, and accidentally saw your husband in Piccadilly. He went into a pawnbroker's shop. I watched him through the window; and, to make a long story short, purchased this

little piece of paper from him for five pounds."

Mildred took it up, unfolded it, and read its contents with complete amazement.

"You did not know he was so bad as that?" he said.

She flew to the *escritoir*, unwilling to believe what was only too patent, without other and more complete evidence of the fact. The broken lock—the trace of violence on the wood—the empty box,—all proved beyond the flimsiest shadow of a doubt that John had been guilty of what would bear the construction of a theft.

"This is dreadful!" she said, in a low, heartbroken tone. "I did not think he would ever sink so low as to steal anything from me! I often wonder why I am condemned to endure so much; but I suppose, we suffer here in order that we may be sanctified hereafter!"

"Rest assured of that, Mrs. Millington," said Varney Vaillant; "yet your pilgrimage on earth, would not have been so wretched had you met with some one who could sympathize with and understand you."

"Marriage is a lottery," said Mildred, folding her hands meekly in her lap.

"And you have drawn a blank?"

"No, no; I will not say that!"

"You will not?"

"No; not yet, at all events. The end has **not** come!"

"Is it far distant? Are the signs<sup>1</sup> with which you are favoured difficult of interpretation? I pity you from the bottom of my heart, and I wish that your married life might be happier."

"When things come to the worst, John may reform."

"Never!" replied Varney Vaillant, with emphasis. "Take my word for that; he is too far gone ever to reform!"

"Let us hope not. Heaven is just!" was her pious reply.

"The poet says 'that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.' The apple was eaten in Eden; man, and the offspring of man, suffers, and will suffer, till the end of time!"

Varney Vaillant told Mrs. Millington that he would take care of the voucher, but that it was at her command whenever she required it. She thoroughly acquiesced in this arrangement, for she deemed it safer in his hands than in her own.

The object with which he visited her had been achieved. She felt her husband's character was repulsive, and was unable to regard him with so much genuine love as she had formerly lavished upon him.

Scarcely had the Frenchman taken his departure, than two ill-featured men rang the bell. When the servant opened the door to them, they pushed their way into the passage, and asked for Mr. Millington. On hearing that he was out, they consented to see his wife, and were shown into the back sitting room, where she joined them.

"What do you want? Mr. Millington is out!" she exclaimed.

"Well, mum; it's a unpleasant bit of bus'ness, but, in course, it ain't our fault! We only does our dooty!" replied the leader.

"What is your duty?" she demanded, calm enough.

We're brokers, mum; and put in by the landlord for the rent; and if it's paid down on the nail, we goes; if not, we stays. Our charge is five shillings a day without anythink; but if you feed us, it's only three. You takes your choice, mum, and we in general has the front kitchen given up to us.'

"Very well," said Mildred, placiug her hand on her heart to still its beating, and proving herself a true heroine. "You can go into the kitchen, and you shall have what you like to eat and drink—that is, in moderation; but I must request you not to tell the servants what you are."

"Cert'nly not, mum," said the man, with a knowing look. "Would you like us to be counted cousins, or shall we say that we have come from the agent's to clean the windows, and do the 'ouse up generally?"

"That will be best. Perhaps you will be paid this evening."

The men bowed, and were shown into the kitchen. Mildred was inclined more than once to give in, break down, and allow the fight with fate to end in her defeat. But the thought of her infant children, and that bright fire of hope—more precious than Prome-

theus' gift to men—which ever burns in mortal breasts buoyed her up, and she determined to struggle on.

Clara had been out for a walk ; as she came home she met the postman at the door. He brought letters from Leonard, bearing the Oporto postmark.

“See,” she said, her countenance sparkling with a joy she could not disguise,—“here are letters from Leonard. Shall I open, and read them aloud?”

Mildred replied in the affirmative, and forebore to communicate her great grief until she had participated in Clara's great joy.

Leonard said that he was prospering ; the only drawback to his happiness and contentment was his separation from those he loved at home. He had made several advantageous purchases for his employers, and he had speculated judiciously with success upon his own account. He was about to undertake a journey through Portugal, into the interior of Spain, with a view of purchasing a vineyard which was famous for its produce ; and as the postal communication was infrequent, they must not be surprised if they did not hear again from him for two or three months.

“Leonard is well,” said Mildred. “That is a gleam of sunshine, at all events.”

“What do you mean by a gleam of sunshine?” asked Clara, still dwelling upon the loved characters in Leonard's letters.

“I would not tell you before, Clara, but I am overwhelmed with misfortunes to-day. John has broken open the escritorio, and taken what little jewellery I

had ; and the landlord has put in a distress for rent, and the brokers are down stairs."

"Is it possible !" cried Clara. "Where is John ? What has he done with the proceeds of his robbery, for it is nothing else ? Oh ! Mildred, if that man were my husband, I think I should be tempted to fly away with the children, and leave him."

"You do not mean that, Clara ?" replied Mildred, softly, and laying her hand on her shoulder as she spoke. "You spoke under the influence of excitement did you not ?"

"Perhaps I did, but still, it is very, very trying."

And so, for the matter of that, it was.

The afternoon passed ; and they anxiously awaited John's return, thinking he would at least bring home some portion of the hundred pounds he had that morning received.

"I am sure he will bring home something ; and then we will pay those odious men, and let them go," said Mildred.

Clara shook her head.

She was not so sanguine as her cousin.

When John came back, to his lasting shame be it chronicled, he was tipsy, as usual.

Mildred, in a moment, saw the disgraceful state in which he was. She did not move. Night after night—week after week—year after year—it was too much. Good wives are always long-suffering ; but is there not a limit beyond which their endurance ought not to go ?

Reeling into the room, John leant against the wall, and said, in a thick voice, "Why don't some of you get up, and let me see the fire? I'm wet through, and want to dry myself. Wet as a rat, I am."

"There is plenty of room, John, if you like to come near the fire, such as it is," replied Mildred.

"Get up, I say!" John continued. "I—I'm master."

Mildred placed the child upon the floor, holding it by the hand. Clara rose, and John had an opportunity of doing as he liked. Both ladies were now standing; but he was not satisfied with this evidence of submission.

He crossed the room, and went towards Mildred, placing his hands in his pockets, and glaring at her with unspeakable ferocity.

Without another word, he raised his hand, and struck his wife in the face. The force of the blow caused her to stagger towards Clara, and fall down at her feet. The poor children, alarmed, but unable to comprehend this terrible scene, began to cry, and clung tenaciously to their mother's dress.

Mildred did not add to the clamour by screaming; but great sobs broke in her throat, and her tears fell fast. Her lips were injured, and a light lambswool jacket she had on was stained with blood.

In his wildest and most frenzied moments, John had never struck her before. He had not dreamt of raising his hand to her. This was altogether new. The in-

sult was intolerable. She could bear much ; but when, half stunned from the effects of the violent blow, she lay upon the floor, with her children making a small Babel around her, she thought that she could not, under any extenuating circumstances, forgive him.

When John saw the result of his violence, and was fully aware of the extent to which his ungovernable temper had led him, he became sobered, as it were, by magic. He would have given worlds to recall that blow ; but once given, it was recorded against him for ever and ever.

All his passion disappeared ; he fell on his knees by his wife's side, and said, in a tone tremulous with emotion, "Forgive me, dearest,—forgive me ! I knew not what I did !"

She gently repulsed him with her hand—pushing him away in a feeble manner.

"Oh, Mildred," continued John, in a heartbroken voice, "believe that I was not answerable for my actions when I entered this room !"

Clara looked severely at John ; and while Mildred sobbed bitterly, said, "There is no excuse for a man who forgets his manhood, and strikes a woman."

"Mildred !" exclaimed John, passionately, and disregarding Clara's remark.

"Not now—not now !" murmured his wife ; "for pity's sake, leave me now ! I will talk to you in the morning—not now !"

"But one word——"



"No, no ; we can arrange a separation in the morning."

John struck his forehead with his clenched fist, and said, as if to himself, "Has it come to that? Is this the result of my folly? I must have come down-hill rapidly, when my wife talks of leaving me!"

"Be advised by me, John," Clara said, in a cold, inflexible voice, which had not one particle of tenderness in it; "to-morrow you can talk to Milly, not now."

"Are you going to side against me?" he said, with a tinge of sadness in his voice. "I will not reproach you. I suppose I deserve it. I have behaved with what people will call unmitigated brutality. Take care of my wife, Clara ; I am going out."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I don't know—anywhere. The river is not far off.

"Are you coward enough to talk of suicide?" she cried, casting unutterable scorn into a look. "Go upstairs, and repent of your wickedness on your knees. You have been a stranger to heartfelt prayer for too long a time. Have you forgotten all the precepts that my father inculcated?"

John was overcome by present grief. The recollections of his boyhood, which Clara called up, humbled him. He was glad to slink away ignominiously, and take refuge in his bed-room, where he soon fell asleep.

Mildred slept with Clara that night, and bedewed her pillow with very bitter tears. Happily, the children were not old enough to be conscious of the shocking reality of what they had witnessed, or it

would have been a tradition with them as long as they lived.

Wearily, wearily passed that night for the young wife. Her spirit was crushed and bruised, but it was not broken. She slept far an hour or two, having fallen into a fitful slumber. When daylight broke, she took up her Bible and Prayer-book ; and tried to glean from their sacred pages whether or not a wife was justified in leaving her husband, after having endured at his hands what she had endured.

Her study lasted for some hours ; and the point, after all, remained a moot one in her mind.



## CHAPTER X.

### EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

WHEN John woke in the morning, he raised himself up in bed, and passed his hand across his brow in a puzzled manner. Was it all a hideous dream, or had he really struck his wife, and caused her to fall wounded and bleeding at Miss Lovibond's feet ?

If so—if he were really guilty of this offence—he had done that which would, in a labouring man, have been punished severely. He escaped, because Mildred was a gentle and forgiving being ; who would not, for her own sake, expose his infamy to the community at large.

She liked her griefs and her sorrows to be private,

and objected to intruding them upon all those who read newspapers.

A sharp pang shot through his heart, as he recalled the scene of the night before. What should he do? How should he make his peace? Perplexed by these and numerous other questions, he dressed himself, and went down stairs. It was breakfast time, but there was no signs of that cheering meal. For some time past the Millingtons had kept no servant. Clara and Midred had done the little work there was to do themselves.

In half an hour's time Clara came down ; she nodded stiffly to John, as if she had no sympathy for him, and began to lay the cloth. Shortly afterwards Mildred made her appearance ; her face was discoloured in more than one place, and she looked the picture of misery.

She was willing enough to forgive almost all trespasses against her ; but the particular trespass of which John had been guilty, was one against the forgiveness of which all her womanly pride rebelled.

When John saw his wife, he crept up to her side and placed his arm round her waist, saying, in a penitent tone, "Once more I ask you to forgive me. I was not responsible, last night, for what I did. Think with me that there were extenuating circumstances."

"Possibly!" was the laconic reply.

"I have your forgiveness, then?" he cried, eagerly.

"I did not say that," rejoined Mildred, with a dignity which was mingled with softness. "I have, for a long time, been a kind and affectionate wife to you; but there is an acme of endurance beyond which I cannot go. It will be best for us to separate. I will not trouble you for anything. You have talent enough to make an excellent income. Clara has a little money left out of the sum Mr. Lovibond bequeathed to her. That is at present in the house. With that to begin with, Clara and I can maintain the children and ourselves. If you are fortunate, and can give us anything, we will not refuse it; but we do not ask you for a penny. All I want is to be alone."

"Are you serious?" inquired John, who was pale, and trembling in every limb.

His long-dormant love was called suddenly into existence once more, and he was conscious of an awakened affection, which, with magnetic influence, brought him, humble and suppliant, to his wife's side.

"Indeed—indeed, John, I am serious!" Mildred said. "I have borne very, very much, and would bear more; but I cannot bear to be ill-treated. I have endeavoured, heaven knows how earnestly, to fulfil my marriage vow. I have taken you for all conditions of life, and I have not murmured because I have been unhappy; yet I feel that something is due to myself, and I would rather leave you amicably, than be again subjected to the treatment I last night met with."

"Were there not extenuating circumstances?" said John.

"If being intoxicated is an extenuating circumstance, I suppose I must admit that there were."

"Will you confess it this once?" John replied. "If so, it shall never occur again. I give you my word, Mildred!"

"I am afraid I cannot believe you," she said. "I should be happy, indeed, to forgive you, if I thought I should not be subjected to a repetition of what happened last night. I cannot, and will not, be treated as a slave. If you forget that you are a gentleman, I cannot forget that I am a lady."

John immediately saw that he had made a breach upon the fortress, and that its defenders were inclined to surrender. He renewed his promises, and reiterated his vows; whereupon Mildred was induced to admit that she had discovered some extenuating circumstances which entitled him to forgiveness.

It is astonishing how forgiving wives are if their husbands only meet them half way. Mrs. Millington pardoned her husband, and a fervent prayer went up from her heart.

John kept his word, to a certain extent. Although he did not leave off drinking, he did not raise his hand to her. There was a perceptible increase of affection in his manner; but, withal, he continued to near the end of his aversus. The descent was easy, and he seemed anxious to near the bottom.

His home became more and more wretched; and yet he would not rouse himself.

Was it not melancholy to see a talented man like

himself going to ruin, and dragging his family into the vortex of the maelstrom with him? It only required an effort, and he would not make it. He must have been infatuated.

A week passed, and during that time John behaved himself in an exemplary manner; but, in spite of himself, a few words which his wife let fall haunted his memory.

He wanted money badly enough; and he longed ardently for society.

Mrs. Millington, when talking of a separation, had alluded to a sum of money which Clara had in the house: if he could only possess himself of Clara's gold, he would be enabled once more to pursue a course of reckless dissipation.

Long brooding over the fact of the money being in the house, made John determined to steal it.

Having come to this resolution, the first thing to be done was to discover the whereabouts of the treasure.

He searched every part of the house, when he thought himself unobserved; and was excessively chagrined at his ill-success, from which he could only conclude that she carried it about her person.

In the dead of night, when all were asleep, he rose from his bed, without disturbing his wife, and, attiring himself in a dressing-gown, walked silently along a passage until he reached Clara's room.

This room was, properly speaking, the nursery, for the children slept there.

Her dress was hanging up over the door. John perceived this by the aid of a night-light, which was burning on the washhand-stand.

In an instant, his hand dived into the pocket, and extracted the purse.

She moved uneasily, as if she felt, instinctively, that she was being robbed ; and he fell on his knees, taking shelter in the shadow which was formed by the foot-board of the bed.

Hearing, after a time, her regular breathing, he got up, and stole from the room as gently as he had entered it.

Sleep was a stranger to his eyelids that night. He lay awake, absorbed in thought, and wishing for the break of day.

He was up early, and started for town before eight o'clock—an unusual thing for him to do, and one which excited Mildred's surprise.

He went to the steamboat pier, and found that owing to a dense fog which prevailed, the boats were not running.

An omnibus served his turn, and, when he had an opportunity, he examined his prize.

Its contents excited his astonishment.

The purse contained a hundred and ten pounds in notes, and fifteen in gold, with a trifling amount of silver.

As he replaced it in the pocket of his coat, he could not help thinking that he was a consummate villain.

Being able to read his own character so well, made him wince ; but it worked no reformation in him.

The spell was over him, and, do what he could, he had not sufficient strength to break it.

In the early part of the morning the time came when the loss was detected. Clara was going out to buy something, but when she put her hand in her pocket, to see if her purse was there, she missed it.

With consternation depicted on her face, she flew to Mildred and burst into tears. They sat side by side upon a sofa. The young mother was teaching her boy how to spell, and the little maiden sat demurely by her brother's side listening attentively to what passed, but without comprehending much.

"What is the matter?" Mildred asked, elevating her eyebrows.

Clara was usually so quiet and impassive, that to see her equable temper ruffled was quite an event.

"Oh, you will scarcely believe me when I tell you!" replied Clara. "You know that, a fortnight ago, I drew out all the money I had left in the bank. I kept it in my dress-pocket, thinking it perfectly safe in my purse ; but I have lost it, and we are without a penny!"

"Lost it !" echoed Mildred, in amazement.

"Yes, indeed !"

"Had you it last night ?"

"I had ; for I looked at and counted the notes and



gold before I went to bed. We have no servant in the house. The children are too young to think of pilfering ; and——”

“I know what you would say,” interrupted Mildred. “You think—you feel sure, in fact, that John has taken our little all from us?”

“Don’t be angry with me for thinking so,” said Clara, with an apologetic look ; “but you know he took our jewellery ; and, if he will make away with one thing, he will with another.”

“It must be John,” Mildred said, with a sigh, “I am afraid, my poor dear Clara, that it was an unfortunate day upon which you came to live in our house. You are involved in our ruin. Heaven help us ! I could bear my misery more patiently, if I thought that you were living happily at Hornsey.”

Mr. Vaillant watched the gradual ruin of the Milingtons passively. He had, on several occasions, stretched out his hand to save them from the precipice ; but, worn out by the continued and incessant drains upon his purse—which, in truth, were more than it could bear ; and seeing that the end must come some day or other, stave it off how he might, he desisted.

Nevertheless he did not lose sight of the impoverished family. He kept himself acquainted with the progress of their affairs, and watched over Mildred, as a gerfalcon watches over a little bird.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE END LOOMS IN THE DISTANCE.

FOR some time John Millington worked, and worked hard ; but so altered was his position, that his exertions did not suffice to bring him in enough to pay his debts, or maintain his family genteelly. It was impossible to keep on the house in High Park Terrace ; but they clung to it for the sake of old associations, and hoped, as all those who are wretched do, for better things and times.

When John came home one night, after working for eight hours consecutively at a large drawing, he found his wife in tears ; drawing his chair near to her, he said, " why are you crying, my darling ? "

" Oh, John," she replied, " I almost dread your coming into the house, for I never have anything cheering to tell you ! It seems so hard that a man should be worried at home, when he works hard all day ; and you have worked nobly lately. "

" What is this new cause of annoyance ? "

" Our landlord will distrain to-morrow, and take what few things we have left, if we do not pay him his rent. "

" What's the amount ? "

" Seventeen pounds. We have allowed two quarters to accumulate. "

" What time is he coming to-morrow ? "

"At nine," replied Mildred.

John took up his hat, which he had placed upon the table, and put it on his head, afterwards buttoning up his coat.

"Where are you going, dear John?" Mildred asked.

"I don't know," was the laconic reply.

"Oh, stay here—stay with me!" she exclaimed clasping her hands together. "I would not have breathed a word of this to you, if I had dreamed it would have driven you out of the house; and yet it is not my fault, John. Clara and I have been as economical as possible—no one can accuse us of extravagance. Stay with me; comfort me, dear John; I am only a woman, and not so strong and brave as you are; my nerves, too, are weaker than they were."

"I will come back again," he said, pulling his hat over his brows to hide his emotion.

"No, no!—you will not. Don't be angry with me for contradicting you, but I know that you will endeavour to forget your troubles in the society of your companions. Your home is miserable, John; but think that I have done all that lay in my power to make it happy. I will not cry." Then she said, wiping her eyes with her pocket handkerchief, "See—I am smiling again."

A very artificial smile it was; the face did not dimple sweetly, as of old, nor did the eyes sparkle with laughing brightness; they were red and swollen, and dimmed with many tears.

He stooped over her chair, and kissed her. She caught him by the hand, and pulling him towards her, endeavoured to remove his hat, but he gently repulsed her.

"You will stay! Say you will not go out and leave me; your poor Milly feels so low and miserable to-night!" she exclaimed, in a wailing, childish voice.

"My dear child, I must go."

"And why? Can you get any money to-night?"

"I can try, at all events."

"Leave it until to-morrow."

"Then it will be too late. Let me go, don't urge me any longer."

"If you are determined, it is useless for me to urge you to stay," she replied, sadly, heaving a deep sigh, which seemed to come from the depths of her aching heart.

Her tears burst out afresh, and streamed through her fingers, as she covered her face with her hands. It was a pitiable sight, and the conscience-stricken man would have given worlds if he could have shifted the load of misery from his wife's shoulders to his own.

The poor lamb did not deserve to suffer; he, on the contrary, merited the severest punishment—the innocent suffered with the guilty.

The end was looming in the distance; he could fancy the last vestige of property taken from him, and his wife and family, together with Clara, turned

into the streets of London, to obtain a living how they could.

His intention was to go to Mr. Varney Vaillant, and entreat his kind assistance ; he was not sanguine of obtaining it ; but when men are desperate, they do not weigh the chances so nicely as they would at another time.

The Frenchman had given John distinctly to understand, that he would not render him any further pecuniary help, adding, that he hoped their acquaintance would not be severed on that account. John was as Bessemer steel that night. He could have stood at the corners of the streets, and have asked the passers-by for money, tolerating a thousand rebuffs, and putting up with innumerable insults.

Mr. Vaillant was at his club, and came out to see John when he heard he was waiting for him. "To go a-borrowing, is to go a-sorrowing." So says the proverb ; but Varney's manner was so genial and polite, that John did not feel so certain of refusal as he had done as he walked along.

They went into the smoking-room, and having caught an opportunity, John exclaimed, " I have come all the way from Fulham to-night to ask a favour. Perhaps you will say, I always have an interested motive in seeking you ; but it so happens that my landlord is going to distrain to-morrow, if I don't pay him seventeen pounds."

"My dear Millington," replied Varney, "I am at

all times glad to see you, and will entertain you, to the best of my ability. I will even get you lucrative employment, as I have done before ; but I will not lend you money. It is extremely painful to refuse you and talk in so decided a manner. Coming to me for a loan, is running your head against a wall with your eyes open. Do not, I beg of you, expose yourself and me to such unpleasantness any more."

He spoke kindly. Very much as a loving parent might speak to a dissolute and spendthrift son.

John ground his teeth and clasped his hands together under the table, until the nails ran into the flesh and hurt him.

"Then you have no compassion for our misery?" he said.

"On the contrary, I am grieved to the heart."

"Yet you refuse to assist us ! If that is your friendship, I would not give much for it," John said, with a wild, sarcastic laugh.

"You forget, my dear fellow," said the Frenchman, quietly, "that I have practically proved my friendship in many ways, and on many different occasions. You are deeply in my debt ; so you cannot reproach me with the hollowness of my protestations."

"We shall be turned into the street, without a shilling."

"Is that my fault ? Am I the cause of the calamity ? Be just—be reasonable !"

"You might prevent it, and you will not ; so you are the indirect and passive cause," John said.

"You are altogether wrong!" Varney Vaillant exclaimed. "I never heard any one talk so absurdly as you."

"But——"

"Listen to me. If I were to befriend you this time, precisely the same thing would happen in another three months. You have been going down-hill, Millington, for a long time; and I endeavoured to arrest your progress until I saw that my labour was in vain. If you cannot keep a house over your head, it is unreasonable in the extreme to expect other people to do it for you."

"Then I have nothing to hope from you?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"I hope you may never feel what I feel this night," answered John, as he rose and hurried from the room.

When he reached the spacious portal of the clubhouse, with its polished marble columns and lengthy flights of steps, he perceived that rain was falling heavily.

A porter asked him if he should fetch a cab, but John shook his head, and plunged into the darkness. Where was the half-crown to pay for a cab? certainly not in his purse. The rain beat in his face and penetrated his clothes, wetting him to the skin long before he reached home.

Wet as he was, the tumult raging in his mind was such, that he did not feel the inconvenience, and seemed scarcely conscious that a cold and merciless

rain was descending perpendicularly from the clouds which, heavy and pluviose, overhung the metropolis.

Mildred was delighted to see him ; and with the greatest care and rapidity helped him to change his wet clothes. She could see that he had been unsuccessful, for his face was careworn and haggard. Then the innate devotion of the loving wife arose in all its majestic beauty when she saw him cast down. Her own grief was merged in one greater than hers. She forgot her misery in the contemplation of her husband's.

"I have done my best, darling," he said ; "I can do no more. Varney refused, in the most point-blank manner, to lend me a farthing !"

"Have you been to him?"

"Yes. Who else is there that I could ask. All our friends have dropped off. We stand alone in the world ; and I—I am the cause of it all ! How infatuated I have been !"

"Never mind, John ; I don't reproach you," Mildred said, tenderly. "I was a little weak and foolish before you went out, but I am myself again now. We have the use of our hands, and our faculties are unimpaired, while our health is good. Are those negative blessings? I think not. Depend upon it, we have much to be thankful for. In the little church at Hornsey I used always to pray for health and strength."

"I could bear anything myself," John replied ; "but when I see you and Clara condemned to undergo great hardships through my criminal folly, it wrings my



heart ! If I could only recall the last five years, how differently would I pass them !”

“ Regrets are useless, John. Experience is usually bought dearly. Something may happen to-morrow, the nature of which we cannot guess at now. The landlord may change his mind, and agree to wait.”

John shook his head sadly : he was not so sanguine as his wife.

When Mildred kissed her children that night before retiring to rest, a tear fell upon their upturned countenances. “ Poor dear little innocents !” she murmured, softly. “ To-morrow you will be homeless ! But your mother will pray to heaven for you, and for herself. He, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, will protect and help us !”

The dreaded morning came at length. Clara rose early, summer and winter, with the scrupulous exactness of a strict disciplinarian. She wandered about the house restlessly—looking at this, and contemplating sadly that, as if she were taking a long farewell of many things, which had become endeared to her by long association.

John had made no provision for his family. He did not know where to go to. He had secured no lodgings. At twelve o'clock that day the Millingtons would veritably be outcasts.

At eight o'clock a carriage drove up to the door. Mildred ran to the window, fearing that a van had arrived to take away their goods.

“ Who is it ?” inquired John, in a hoarse voice.

"If I am not greatly mistaken, it is Mr. Vaillant!" Mildred replied.

"He! What does he want here? If he has come to enjoy our misery, I——"

"Don't excite yourself, John," said his wife, soothingly. "For my sake—for all our sakes—be calm!"

He controlled himself by an effort, and walked impatiently up and down the poorly-furnished room.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE VIPER BARES HIS FANGS.

MILDRED was perfectly correct in stating that Mr. Vaillant was their early visitor. Throwing the reins to his groom, he alighted from his phaeton, and was on the door-step, confronted by Clara, who opened the door to him, saying, frigidly, "Good morning! we do not keep a servant now!"

He bowed, and passing her, entered the passage. "Is Mrs. Millington at home, or her husband?" he asked.

"Mildred is seldom out so early."

"Oh! I perceive, I have intruded; I will call again in an hour."

"Not at all—pray walk in."

Thus invited, he entered the sitting-room. John

gave him a surly nod, but Mildred shook him cordially by the hand.

"The old story !" said Varney Vaillant, to himself ;  
"no longer pipe, no longer dance !"

"I took the liberty of calling," he exclaimed, "to say, that as I was driving along this morning, I saw some apartments which I thought would just suit you, Millington. They are at No. 3, Staplehurst Gardens ; and not knowing whether you were provided in that respect, I ventured to pay a week's rent in advance, and hire them for you ; so that you can take possession whenever it is convenient for you to do so."

"Thank you," said John, moodily.

"We are much indebted to you," Mildred exclaimed.  
"I suppose my husband told you last night that we leave here to-day ; and the notice was so sudden, that we have been unable to secure apartments."

"Had not John better go there, and tell them to expect us soon," interposed Clara. "We must have a fire in the children's room."

John was, that morning, perfectly agreeable to do anything ; and, without waiting to be asked twice, he started for Staplehurst Gardens to do as he was requested.

Clara went up-stairs to give the children some breakfast, and dress them ; consequently, Varney Vaillant was, for a brief space, left alone with Mildred.

"I am extremely sorry that affairs should have come to this pass," he exclaimed. "You must

admit that I have done all that friendship could dictate."

"Yes," she replied ; "and your liberality would have saved us on more than one occasion if John had not been utterly lost to all the promptings of prudence. He seems sensible of his folly now. He must have been in a trance. His conduct has been like that of one bewitched."

"Has not his base behaviour lessened your regard for him?" asked the Frenchman, fixing his eyes keenly upon her.

"No. I am not sensible of any diminution of affection on my part," she answered innocently ; "I have always hoped sincerely that he would some day awake, and retrieve the past."

"You go upon the principle of 'better late than never!'"

"I do. But John now shows symptoms of contrition."

"Very likely," said Varney, with an incredulous smile. "That is to be expected. His foolishness is now coming home to him as it never did before. But, were I to place money in his hands, what would be the result? Would he have strength to resist temptation, or would he relapse?"

"Let us hope that he would have strength," she said, with a look of pious resignation.

"Is it possible that you are such a tyro in the ways of the world as to believe for a moment that the man who has for years been a confirmed drunkard can ever

reclaim himself? No, no ! He may so far control his propensities as to resolve, and keep his resolve for a time, but he will, after a while—he must—infallibly treat resolution.”

“You are drawing a very vivid picture,” said Mildred slightly alarmed ; “but I cannot bring myself to think that it is a true one.”

“You will never be happy with your husband.”

“In that case I must not murmur. I agreed to love him through all ; and if heaven gives me strength I will do so.”

“Do you never wish that you had the wings of a dove, that you might fly away, and be at rest ?”

“It would be wrong to wish that.”

“Can you declare that you have never indulged the wish ?”

“No, I candidly admit that I cannot.”

“That is an admission which I expected. Your patience and resignation would have been superhuman if you had not sometimes repined at your hard lot. Job, the most patient amongst men, was not patient at all times. How happy you might have been, had you met with a different husband !”

Mildred looked curiously at him, wondering whether these remarks contained any hidden meaning, or whether they were merely commonplace expressions of sympathy.

“We cannot all be happy,” she said. “Perhaps trials on earth herald a blissful hereafter.”

“Suppose,” said Varney Vaillant, in a tender tone,

“that I were to say to you—mind, it is merely a supposition—quit all this misery ; fly to a distant land—the Far West or the sunny East—where you can live in luxury, and know no more want ! leave England, and all its associations, which must be painful, rather than the reverse. Suppose that I——”

“What!” cried Mildred, abruptly ; “leave my husband, my children, my——”

“Hear me out.”

“No sir, I will not !” Mildred exclaimed, while the colour rushed to her face. “It is impossible for me to listen to such dishonourable proposals ! Oh, that John were here now ; he would protect me !”

“Calm yourself !” said Mr. Vaillant, alarmed at her indignant agitation. “You have I am afraid, misunderstood me !”

“Not for a moment ! I have understood you too well !”

“We were arguing upon supposition.”

“That is but throwing a flimsy veil over your remarks !” she replied, courageously. “You have said to me what no good and virtuous wife may listen to ; and the moment John comes in, I shall inform him of what has passed between us !”

“I must beg of you not to do that.”

Mildred burst into tears. She deeply felt the insult to which she had been subjected, and was inconsolable for a time.

“Will you hear me, Mrs. Millington ? I apologize most humbly for having caused you pain and annoy-

ance!" exclaimed the Frenchman, who had been biting his lips.

She looked up.

"I must ask you, by the memory of our former friendship, and by the recollection of all I have done for you, not to mention what has passed to your husband!"

"Are you, then, afraid of receiving that chastisement at his hands which you know your conduct merits?"

"For the matter of that, I am afraid of no one!" replied the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders.

Mildred now began to recover her self-possession, which had temporarily deserted her.

"I will pardon you on one condition!" she exclaimed.

"Name it."

"Leave this house immediately, and never again cross my threshold. Promise me that, on your word of ho——shall I say, honour?—and I will not repeat what has passed between us to John!"

"I agree to those terms, Mrs. Millington; and I hope and trust you will some day arrive at the conclusion that you have misconstrued the few harmless phrases which fell from my lips!"

"You spoke too plainly, sir, to allow me to place any misconstruction upon what you said," Mildred replied, stiffly.

Having received his dismissal, Mr. Vaillant bowed, and at once left the room, casting a glance of mingled

annoyance and admiration upon Mildred as he passed her.

Had she been at his side as the street door slammed behind him, she might have heard him exclaim, between his teeth, "If fair means will not succeed, we must try foul!"

John came home looking radiant. He had been to the lodgings which the Frenchman had thoughtfully taken for him, and was thoroughly satisfied with them.

"You will be very much pleased with the place and the people," he exclaimed, not noticing Mildred's pallor and agitation; or, if he did notice it, attributing it to dread of the scene which was to take place presently.

"I am thankful for that," she replied.

"The house," continued John, "is kept by an old widow lady. Quite a motherly sort of person, who says she has a great affection for children. I concluded from what I heard her say, that she has, at some period of her life, lost some that were very dear to her."

"Had not Clara better take the children round there at once? It is not far to walk."

"Yes, my dear. Send them, by all means, if you like," John answered. "It was very kind and thoughtful of Vaillant to look out for lodgings for us. I believe I have judged him harshly. He has lent me several sums of money—and there is a limit to good nature. We must not forget what he has done, while brooding over what he would not do."



Mildred did not reply to this. She could not trust herself to utter a remark about the Frenchman, lest she should involuntarily break her promise, and betray his villany. She blamed herself for having made the promise, for it was clearly her duty to make John acquainted with what had passed.

As she was moving towards the door, Clara came in with the children, one of whom was hanging to each hand.

"Oh, I was just going up-stairs to ask you to dress the children, and take them round to Staplehurst Gardens," Mildred exclaimed.

"They said they wanted to kiss you, so I brought them down," replied Clara.

Mildred stooped down, and held out her arms, as the little wee things came toddling towards her, and kissed them affectionately.

There was a loud knock at the door, which John answered—he admitted the landlord and two men, while a third waited outside with a cart.

The landlord was a short, stout nian, with a restless eye, which seemed to be always wandering round a room, and taking an inventory of its contents.

"What do you want?" John asked as a matter of form, knowing well enough that he had come for his rent or an equivalent.

"I have called for seventeen pounds due to me by you for the use of this house; and if it is not paid, I shall proceed to distrain, having gone through all the

formalities necessary to enable me to do so," replied the landlord. "I am sorry to be obliged to proceed to extremities; but——"

"Say no more!" cried John, impatiently. "I cannot pay you the money, so you must do your worst!"

Although what was about to ensue was expected, Mildred could not help regretting that their ill-luck should have culminated in a distraint for rent. She saw the things valued by the parochial official, and beheld them dragged away ruthlessly, and placed in the cart outside.

That writing-desk was the present of her father! the work-basket, alas! recalled Mr. Lovibond, for she had it in her happy days she passed at Hornsey! the glass over the chimney-piece was an old friend—many times had it reflected her face, radiant with smiles, which always hovered around her lips when she was first married.

John looked stolidly on, and regarded the spoliation with the air of a warrior who has lost his shield.

Unable to contain herself any longer, Mildred burst into tears, and leaning her head on her husband's shoulder, sobbed bitterly. The children, affected by their mother's grief, also began to cry, and held on to the skirts of her dress.

The landlord and his men hurried through their work, as if they did not like it. It was soon accomplished, for the house was so wretchedly furnished, that the few things in it scarcely sufficed to satisfy the demand of the landlord.

Clara took the children away, and, dressing them, walked round with them to the harbour of refuge discovered by the Frenchman.

"Oh, John, John," said Mildred, "if we get through these troubles, and establish ourselves once more in the world, this must not happen again. Spare me this degradation!"

He promised he would, and looked mournfully round the empty house, which seemed so desolate and bare, now that it was stripped of everything which had formerly adorned it. It was poverty-stricken enough before, but now the desolation was complete.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once more let us seek the cosy precincts of the chamber in Pall Mall. "The Frenchman," as John Millington was fond of calling him, was closeted with a friend—a compatriot—who had sought "England's hospitable shores" during the troubles of '48, and brought his property—that is, all of it available—with him.

They were both drinking absinthe, and smoking Russian cigarettes. His friend, M. Sainte-Roche, after exhaling a cloud of white smoke, which curled upwards fantastically towards the ceiling, exclaimed, "Have you exhausted all the means in your power?"

"All the fair means, my dear boy," replied Varney Vaillant.

"Is the game worth the trouble?"

"I think so, or I should not have summoned you to my councils. I must make her love me. Will you assist me to carry her off, to-morrow night?"

"You know you can command me, at any time. If I can be of service to you, don't hesitate to tell me so," replied M. Sainte-Roche, in very good French.

"That is enough. I will arrange matters to-day, and let you know what is to be done in the morning. You may laugh at me, Sainte-Roche, but I solemnly avow that I have not a syllable or a look for any one but her. She has tried to drive me from her side by severity—she has offended my pride; but, defy me as she will, I am hers in life and death!"

The Frenchman spoke earnestly and energetically. It was apparent that he meant what he said, and his words boded nothing but ill to Mildred, who was, in all conscience, sufficiently overwhelmed with trouble already.

Varney Vaillant sat down at a table, and wrote a note, which he read out to his friend. It began:—

"MY DEAR MRS. MILLINGTON,—

"I regret to inform you that your husband is in very bad hands. I fear he will get into trouble. Your immediate presence alone will save him. I beg of you to come at once. Not a moment is to be lost. The bearer of this note will conduct you to the tavern in which your husband unfortunately is drinking himself into a state of frenzy. Believe me, my dear Mrs. Millington,

"Yours as ever,

VARNEY VAILLANT

"That, my dear Saint-Roche, is for you. You will meet me here to-morrow, at four o'clock, then you shall receive further instructions."

Saint-Roche nodded his head.

The train was being cunningly laid. Nothing was wanting but the lighted match to cause a magnificent explosion.

\* \* \* \* \*

While this scene was being enacted in Pall Mall, something worthy of note happened at Fulham.

The lady who kept the house in Staplehurst Gardens had not made her living by letting lodgings for many years without being tolerably acute.

When John left her to go back to his wife, the widow followed him, and arrived at High Park Terrace, in time to see the furniture distrained upon, and placed in the cart. The tradespeople in the vicinity were very communicative, and she determined to refuse the exiles admittance into the house.

So, when Clara arrived with the children, and knocked at the door, she, in spite of her fondness for children, sharply asked her what she wanted.

"A gentleman has taken these apartments, I believe?" replied Clara.

"Some one did apply for them, but the reference he gave was unsatisfactory."

"If I am correctly informed, he paid a deposit."

"That is perfectly correct ; and it shall be returned to him whenever he calls," said the widow.

"Do I understand that you refuse to let the lodgings?"

"To you and your friends, I do." The door was slammed in Clara's face.

Taking little Milly in her arm, and leading Johnny by the hand, she trudged wearily back to High Park Terrace, and was admitted by John, who had not left.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Have you come back again?"

"Yes. The woman would not let us in. She says she is not satisfied with us," replied Clara.

"The news must have travelled quickly, or she has been making inquiries about here."

"It does not matter how it has happened. She will not admit us."

"We cannot stay here," said Mildred, looking around her with a shudder.

"It is a case of necessity. We have only a few shillings," said Clara; "and with that we can do nothing."

"But there is scarcely a vestige of furniture left."

"So much the worse," replied Clara.

John's fortitude gave way, and sinking into an imperfect chair, which had been left on account of its inutility, said, in a broken voice, "O Lord, punish me—punish me—for I alone am guilty!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THIRZA.

THE flower-girl, whom John had, at such a terrible cost to himself, rescued from the police, lived, with her married sister and her family, in a strange and quaint old place called the Colonnade. Very strange and very quaint is the Colonnade. It skirts one side of a yard; a rude balcony, supported by innumerable wooden pillars, runs along a row of small houses, facing a line of stables.

The flower-girl's name was Thirza, and her sister's husband was well-known in the yard as Jack Pothacary, the best-natured and most genial-hearted fellow that ever lived. He obtained the means of subsistence by working in the farrier's shop attached to the yard. At all hours of the day he might have been seen in his shirt, with his sleeves tucked up, and a leather apron round his waist, shoeing horses, or beating red-hot pieces of iron into shape upon the anvil.

His wife, having two children to maintain, managed a small business under the Colonnade. She sold sweetmeats to the children, and retailed the various weekly journals and newspapers to those who were literary in their tastes. She also had in stock, such things as kites, peg-tops, boot-laces, pins, needles, buttons, string, pens, ink, paper and envelopes, and the count-

less nick-nacks which go to make up the total of a fancy business.

Thirza was independent enough to refuse to be indebted to her relatives for anything but their friendship. When Saturday night came, she was always ready with the small modicum of money she agreed to pay them as rent. They would have been glad if she would have stayed at home with them, but she would not listen to such a proposition. There was a dash of Bohemian blood in her veins, and wander she must, be the consequences what they might.

Sometimes Thirza wandered about the outskirts of the metropolis until late at night. It was painful to her to take her dearly-loved flowers back to the Colonnade, to die and wither before the morning. A feeling of disgust took possession of her when she was compelled to walk about for hours without selling a single bunch. And those busy citizens, hurrying to and fro, care for nothing but money. Was gold king, to the exclusion of everything else? A few flowers might temper a harsh disposition with mildness. But what has a business man to do with flowers? He wishes no memories of the past to be aroused by the soft petal of a rose—he would rather drive those memories back, and stifle them for ever. Is he not going to call upon his debtor for the uttermost farthing? Does he not want his pound of flesh as much as did Shylock, the Jew, who was a creditor of the unfortunate Merchant of Venice. No flowers—no flowers! They clash with interest at sixty per cent.,



and fade when under the shadow of Basinghall Street.

Altogether, Thirza was happy. Her nomad life, unsatisfactory as it would have been to most people, pleased her. She was unambitious; her wishes were but few, and she could at all times find her paradise in a garden.

How she loved the unconscious flowers! What intoxication was there for her in the perfumes they distilled. No picture by an old master ever delighted a collector as her old-established floral favorites delighted her. She would not have exchanged a geranium for a Cuypp; or have taken a Peter Paul Rubens in lieu of a primrose.

She bought her flowers every morning in Covent Garden Market, and took them to the Colonnade, in the heart of Bloomsbury, nestling under the shadow of a great square. She would sit down on the stones in the yard, with her sister's children—two boys, eight and nine, respectively—around her. Then her innate taste came to her aid, and she made her bouquets, contrasting colours properly together, and making her little bundles as attractive as nature and art could render them.

She always thought much of John; and when his trouble overwhelmed him, she began to dream about him and his home. On the morning, when his scanty furniture was seized for debt, she had a revelation of the event in her sleep; and she resolved upon doing something generous if her suspicions proved to be well founded.

She had just finished arranging her floral treasures, when she walked to the farrier's shop at the end of the yard, and called John Pothacary to her. Several children were looking in at the smithy-door, eagerly watching the flaming forge, and the glittering sparks, and the ever-restless bellows which fanned the fire to a clear white heat.

Jack was not the strong and brawny individual that popular superstition associates with a blacksmith. He was thin, sinewy, and wiry, rather than a mighty man, with an arm like a piece of welded iron. Business being rather slack that morning before breakfast, Jack was employing himself in making nails. He at once desisted when Thirza called him; and, giving her a nod, as much as to say he fully understood breakfast to be ready, went to a bucket of water, standing in a corner, and with the aid of a square lump of yellow soap, washed his hands and face free from the smoke and dust of the forge.

In going through his shop to the breakfast-parlour, he stopped to admire Thirza's basket of flowers, but he did not touch them, for it was her custom every day to make him a present of one of the prettiest to put in his coat. She stopped him near the counter, and putting a chrysanthemum in his coat, said, "I want the money I gave you to put away in the cupboard."

"You shall have it, my lass," he replied, "but I suppose you won't mind my asking you what it is for; are you going into the wholesale flower line?"

"No; that would not do for me. I had a dream last night."

"A dream! What has that to do with money?"

"I think my friend wants it. I dreamt that my preserver was in great distress. Let me have the money, Jack. I have only saved it for an occasion like this.

Jack Pothacary muttered something about it being better to give him the money; but he knew his sister-in-law's enthusiastic, almost spiritual, character so well, as to be sure that no remonstrance or expostulation of his would be of any avail; so, he betook himself upstairs, and brought an old stocking, in the toe of which was the sum of fifty shillings.

This was what Thirza had saved.

Having secured it about her person, she ate a simple breakfast, and, putting her basket on her head, set out for Fulham, uttering, at intervals, her musical cry, "Come, buy my fine flowers, fine flowers--come, buy my fine flowers, fine flowers!"

The fickle goddess seemed to smile upon her that day, for she had not walked half-way along Piccadilly before she sold half the contents of her basket, and at prices she had not hoped for. She arrived at John's house when the unhappy family were plunged into the deepest grief. Clara had not long returned from Staplehurst Gardens, and the affliction of the family was complete.

When a timid ring was heard at the area bell, Clara went to the door, and appeared quite angry with the

flower-girl for coming at such a time. It was, in effect, mocking their misery.

"Go away, if you please. We have no money to buy flowers to-day, and we cannot accept any more as a present," she cried, recognising Thirza as the poor girl who had so often left bunches of roses and other flowers at the house.

"I want to see the gentleman," responded Thirza.

"I am afraid you cannot to-day. He is not in the humour to receive visitors."

"Oh, I am sure he will see me, if you tell him who I am!" cried Thirza, anxiously.

"Have you any message for him? That will be the best way to get out of the difficulty. I will take a message to him."

"Who is that?" inquired John, supposing it was a creditor, and coming forward like a stag at bay, and thinking it only fair to relieve Clara from an unpleasant and disagreeable duty.

On arriving at the end of the passage, he recognised Thirza, and said, "Oh, it's you! I cannot buy any flowers this morning, I—why disguise the truth—I! haven't the money."

"That's nothing, sir," answered Thirza. "I do not want anything. I have always been proud and happy for you to accept my flowers. I shall never forget your kindness to me, and have waited a long, long time to express my gratitude."

"Thank you," said John. "I only did what, in spite of the consequences, I still think every Englishman

should do—I helped a woman in distress. I firmly believed that you were being unjustly persecuted, and I interposed.”

“May I speak to you alone for a minute, sir?” asked Thirza, timidly looking at Clara.

“For certain reasons, I cannot ask you inside to-day,” John replied; “but I shall be glad to listen to anything you have to say here.”

Clara fell back a few paces; and Thirza immediately said, in a low, quick, hurried tone, “I shall never forgive myself if I offend you by what I am going to say. I had a dream last night. My mother had the gift of second-sight, so that I always attach importance to my dreams. I thought you were nearly destitute, and that your children were crying for food.”

At that moment, a cry proceeded from an adjoining room. Master John was impatient for his dinner, and, because he could not get it, gave vent to his feelings in a manner not confined to himself, but peculiar to all children.

“If my dream is true, as I fear it is,” she continued, “take this. It is all I have been able to save during some years.”

“No, no,” cried John, turning fiery red in the face. “You are mistaken! Keep your money! Your dream has misled you!”

His pride would not allow him to admit that the flower-girl’s savings would make his family and himself happy for a week.

Feeling instinctively that she was right in supposing

John to be in needy circumstances, Thirza placed the scrap of paper, containing the money, in his hand, and hastily snatching up her basket, walked away, with great rapidity. It was in vain that John called after her. She would not turn her head.

He allowed the money to fall upon the uncarpeted boards of the passage. Clara, who had witnessed the incident, pushed the silver and gold on one side with her foot, and shut the door. Then she said, "Heaven-sent birds fed the prophet, Elijah ; let us be thankful for this almost miraculous occurrence.

John re-entered the sitting-room, while Clara picked up the coins. The starvation which had stared them in the face was averted for a time.

The afternoon of the day which ushered in the distraint did not pass so miserably as the morning. When John saw the wretched state to which his family was reduced by his own sinful folly, his scruples as to using the flower-girl's money vanished.

Clara expended a small portion of the little sum in purchasing wholesome and nutritious food, which quieted the children, and made them sit contentedly on the once gaily carpeted floor.

John thought it yet possible to retrieve his position. A week's hard work would supply him with money and continued labour would enable him to lay the foundation of another home, which, with good conduct, might be made much—much happier than the one he had just lost.

Two or three old mattresses, which the bailiffs deemed scarcely worth taking away, remained in the upper rooms; upon one of these, in a comfortless apartment, the children were laid, at an early hour. Clara was a clever water-colour artist, and she could also draw well with her pencil. She was especially talented in crayons, and having lighted a candle, she began to finish a sketch, which she hoped to be able to show and sell the next day.

Mildred and John were together, and the former could not lose the opportunity which offered itself of cautioning him against a repetition of the course of behaviour which had brought them to a state of destitution.

John was deeply affected; and as he held his wife's tiny hand in his own, he reviewed the events of his married life, and said, penitently, "The spell is at last broken. I will show my friends that I have been infatuated, and that I am not radically bad! You shall not again have cause to complain of me. I ask you to forgive me for the past."

"You have my forgiveness, dear John," replied Mildred. "Of that you may at all times be satisfied. I have no wish to reproach you; all I want is for you to reform. For the sake of your children you should do so; put me out of the question——"

"That I cannot do!" he interrupted. "You are the best wife that man was ever blessed with; and I am worthy of execration for having treated you as I have done!"

"The sun shines all the more brightly for being temporarily eclipsed by a cloud," said Mildred, with a smile. "I cannot help believing that there are many, many happy days in store for us!"

There was a knock at the door, which John, responded to in person. A boy was standing on the step.

"What do you want?" inquired John.

"Mr. Millington."

"I am he. Where do you come from?"

"A gentleman some little way from here sent me, sir. He wants to see you directly."

"Where?"

"At the house of call for all nations, near Sloane Street, sir," replied the boy.

"I know it. What sort of a gentleman was it who sent you?" said John, pursuing his interrogations.

"Rather tall and thin—looked like a foreigner, sir."

"Very well. You may go back and say I will come shortly."

The boy ran away as if he had been told by his employer to make haste; and John resought his wife's side.

"Somebody wants me, dearest," he exclaimed. "I must go out for a little while."

"Go out! Not to-night! You cannot leave Clara and me to be by ourselves in this ruined home! I am sure no one can want to see you on business to-night; and you can't think of going for pleasure under existing circumstances!" cried Mildred.



"I wonder who it is. The boy described him as a foreigner," John said, disregarding his wife's remarks.

"The only foreigner amongst your friends I know is Mr. Vaillant. Can it be he?"

"I should think not. He would have sent a card, a note, or, at least, his name. It may be he; but I doubt it. I will just run down to the appointed place. You may rely upon my speedy return."

"On that understanding, I consent to your going," said Mildred.

Putting on his hat and coat, John set out on his walk, moving briskly along, occupying his thoughts with speculations as to who his friend could be.

What was his surprise on reaching the house of all nations to find Varney Vaillant in the parlour! He held out his hand a little reluctantly; but it was grasped in a very cordial manner.

"Thanks for attending so promptly to my hasty message," exclaimed Vaillant. "Permit me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Sainte-Roche."

The introduction was accomplished; and John found himself sitting in a cheery room between the two Frenchmen. The scene presented such a contrast to his own naked home, that he felt his spirits rise at the idea—or rather the fact of being emancipated from its wretchedness for even a brief space.

"What will you have?" said Varney. "We are taking Hermitage—perhaps you would prefer some spirit?"

"I—I would rather not have anything," replied

John, in a hesitating manner. "The fact is, I promised my wife faithfully to come back almost directly;" and he added, lowering his voice so as not to be overheard by Mr. Saint-Roche, "you know very well how we are situated. It would be scarcely fair to leave her by herself for any length of time."

"Certainly not," answered the Frenchman. "I should be the last to ask you to do anything of the kind. I sent for you because I wished to speak to you; and I thought that a short conversation with a friend would cheer you up, and banish your oppressive thoughts."

A little more persuasion induced John to drink a glass of wine; that was followed by another; and having broken the ice, he thought he might just as well have a third. A peculiarity of John's was, that when he had taken more than one glass of anything—no matter what—he never cared about going home.

The picture which had a short time before occupied his mind to the exclusion of everything else, now vanished into thin air. The wreck of his home—his pale-faced but loving wife anxiously awaiting his return—Clara hard at work with her brush—all escaped his memory, as water runs through a sieve.

When Vaillant saw that John was falling into the trap which he had taken the trouble to lay for him, he plied him with more wine, and said, "I have heard all about your ill-succcess at Staplehurst Gardens this morning. That, however was not my fault; I did the best I could for you. It was not until an hour ago

that the intelligence reached me, and I at once concluded you would be sadly straitened for funds. I have some loose gold about me, and you shall help yourself before we part."

"You are still my friend!" John exclaimed, delightedly.

"Did you question the fact?"

"I am sorry to say I was foolish and ungrateful enough to do so."

"I am a little mysterious now and then ; it is difficult at all times to put a proper interpretation upon my actions," returned the Frenchman, with a complacent smile.

He would not give John any money at once ; he promised it him before they parted, wishing to keep him where he was for a certain length of time, knowing very well that John would not go until he was turned out, when there was plenty of wine and a prospect of money at some period or other of the evening.

An hour and a half slipped by very agreeably. John forgot his misfortunes, drowning them in the "merry bowl," and laughed and talked with a rapidity that exceeded the volubility of either of his companions.

Looking at his watch, Varney Vaillant exclaimed, "I don't wish to disturb you, my dear Sainte-Roche ; but you must permit me to remind you that the time is slipping by, and if you do not succeed in catching your friend, you will lose all opportunity of delivering your letter."

"Oh, yes ; many thanks for reminding me. I will start at once," replied Sainte-Roche.

He got up and left the room, promising to return as soon as he had transacted the pressing business which called him away. When he was gone, Vaillant said to John, "Come, Millington, fill up your glass, drown your cares ; follow a philosopher's advice, and snap your fingers at fortune."

John laughed loudly, emptied his glass, filled it, emptied it again ; and slapping his friend on the back, told him that he was a "jolly good fellow."

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE ABDUCTION.

WEARILY watching — wearily watching — Mildred would have sat the livelong night waiting for her husband.

Grave suspicions began to take possession of her mind, for she knew how weak-minded and easily led astray John was ; had he again yielded to the solicitations of his companions, and plunged into a drunken orgie, regardless of her misery and the state of his wretched, ruined home ?

The candle burned low in its socket, and Clara desisted from her work because her eyes ached, and she could no longer distinguish the different colours with sufficient exactitude.

She was not in the mood for conversation; at times, there is a melancholy pleasure in silent meditation, to be violently aroused from which is positive pain.

Mr. Sainte-Roche lost no time in seeking High Park Terrace, and, when his knock re-echoed through the house, Mildred at once jumped to the conclusion that John had, in fulfilment of his promise, returned.

How great, then, was her surprise and dismay when she saw a strange gentleman, whom she never recollected having seen before.

He exclaimed, in a hurried manner, as if his business was of vital importance, "Am I addressing Mrs. Millington?"

"You are," she replied, placing her hand upon her heart, to stay its wild palpitations.

"That note is for you," he added, upon hearing this.

She took the proffered note, saying, "I am sure you will pardon me while I read it."

He bowed.

At the first attempt to break open the letter, her trembling fingers would scarcely permit her to do so.

When this task was accomplished, she unfolded the paper, and read the cruel, false, and heartless lines which Varney Vaillant had written the day before at his chambers in Pall Mall.

She uttered a smothered shriek, which brought Clara on the scene.

“What is it?” she cried. “Has anything happened?”

“The letter—read the letter!” replied Mildred, handing it to her. “My husband is in danger! Mr. Vaillant has sent for me?”

“If so, you must go!” replied Clara, whose ideas of duty were very clearly defined.

“Yes, yes—I will go! Where is my bonnet? Kiss the children for me, Clara; I cannot stay to do it now! Let me wear your black shawl; it is down stairs. I cannot wait to get my own. Please make haste; you don’t know what may be happening to John!”

“Nothing very serious, I trust! Perhaps this gentleman, who has so kindly brought the letter, can tell us something about it?” said Clara, assisting Mildred on with the shawl.

She looked for Sainte-Roche, but he was not to be seen. He had gone away, and it was somewhat remarkable that he should do so without saying a word of his intention.

“Where has he gone?” exclaimed Clara. “I saw him here but just now. Strange that he should have vanished so suddenly!”

Mildred fully acquiesced in this opinion; but she did not stay to discuss the matter. It was enough for her that one of her husband’s friends had told her that he was in danger, and that her aid was required; then, like Ariel, she would put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes.

Clara looked after her in the dark night, and

breathed a fervent prayer for her safety ; then, with a weary sigh, she pushed too the door, and sat moodily by the side of the table, looking at the candle, and waiting for the end.

Mildred walked quickly towards the tavern, known as the "All Nations," for Varney had added a postscript to his note, telling her to go there. While on the way, she perplexed her mind with a thousand questions without obtaining a reliable or trustworthy answer to any one of them. She feared something serious had occurred, or Mr. Vaillant would not have written to her in the pressing way he had done.

While we leave her on her way, it is necessary to return to John, and chronicle the doings of the two Frenchmen. Sainte-Roche left High Park Terrace abruptly, because he was positive Mildred would ask him to escort her to the place where her husband was to be found. This he was reluctant to do. Varney would be waiting for his re-appearance, as his plan of action depended upon the answer Mildred sent.

When Saint-Roche entered the room, John was as nearly intoxicated as possible. He had asked two or three men, who were smoking in the parlour, to join him in a glass of wine. This Varney made no objection to, and a noisy, if not a select party, was speedily formed under John's presidency.

Seeing Sainte-Roche, Varney rose, and beckoned him into a corner.

Speaking in a low tone of voice, he said, "What news? How did she take my letter?"

"Very much to heart ! She is terribly alarmed, and will be here shortly."

"Capital ! The bait was a good one ! Should you know her again ?"

"Oh, yes !"

"Then listen to me. My brougham is round the corner, standing near the darkest part of the square. She must pass through the square, on her way from Fulham. My valet, Alphonse, is sitting on the box, by the side of the coachman. Go at once to the brougham, rouse Alphonse, and lay in wait near the first lamp-post ! Do you understand ?"

"Perfectly !"

"So far, so good ! There are few people about now. The square is lonely and deserted. We need not fear interference if we manage the affair skilfully. I will walk up and down the pavement, so as to avoid suspicion. I shall speak to her, and when I pass you, and cough loudly, you must, with Alphonse's assistance, help me to place her in the brougham."

"I perceive !"

"Is it all clear to you ?"

"All !" replied Saint-Roche, sagaciously.

"Away, then, to the square, at once ! I shall not be a minute before I follow you. I wish to speak to this poor fool here, and explain my absence."

Varney Vaillant poured out a glass of wine, and tossed it off at a draught. John applauded the feat, and followed an example so much to his taste.



Seeing his friend's hat on his head, he said, in surprise. "Are you going to leave us?"

"Only for a short time. Order as much wine as you like. I shall not be long gone."

"We'll drink to your speedy return," said John, with a hiccup, suiting the action to the word.

John was utterly unconscious of the peril in which his beloved wife stood. Far was he from imagining that his bosom friend was about to play the part of a traitor of the deepest and most infamous dye. He sang snatches of songs, told anecdotes, and made himself generally amusing.

Meanwhile, the snake was moving in the grass, while its victim neared the reptile unsuspectingly.

Vaillant had scarcely reached the middle of the quare before he saw a dark figure approaching him. It gradually became more defined, and he was able at last to recognise Mildred.

The recognition was mutual. She sprang towards him, exclaiming, "Oh, Mr. Vaillant, I am so glad I have met you! Where is John, and what made you write me so mysterious a letter?"

"He is very much intoxicated, and extremely violent. It is necessary to get him home; and finding my poor efforts unavailing, I took the liberty of sending for you," replied the Frenchman, gazing down upon her pallid face with a lynx-like eye, and carefully studying its various emotions."

"You did perfectly right; and believe me I am

deeply thankful to you for your solicitude. I feel acts of kindness more now than ever I did. Oh! if you knew, as I do, what it is to be poor and friendless—but I must not talk of that now. Lead me, if you please, to John; we will hire a cab, and take him home."

"You are not afraid of him?" asked Varney, placing himself by her side.

"Oh, dear, no!" she answered, confidently.

"I think I have heard that he once struck you?"

"That's true. It was but once though. He never repeated the outrage, and seemed so thoroughly and sincerely penitent, that I forgave him as soon as the offence was committed—certainly before its traces were entirely obliterated."

"May I offer you my arm?"

"Thank you, no, not just now; the roads are rather muddy, and I must hold my dress up."

"Dear me, how late it is!" said Vaillant, as the clock struck twelve; "I had no conception that the hours had slipped away so quickly."

They now neared the lamp-post, at the foot of which his accomplices were standing, apparently engaged in idle conversation.

Varney coughed loudly.

Sainte-Roche and Alphonse took their hands out of their pockets, dropped their cigars, and approached Mildred with a slouching gait.

"Now—now is your time! Quick! Be expeditious!" cried Varney, grasping Mildred's arm tightly,

and pushing her off the curb into the road.

"Oh !" screamed Mildred ; " what is the meaning of this !"

Alphonse and Sainte-Roche now surrounded her, and she was being dragged across the highway to the brougham, when she contrived by a violent effort to remove the Frenchman's hand from her mouth.

Before he could again smother her voice with his odious palm, she shouted, in tones shrill and clear as those of a clarion, " Help ! help !—in heaven's name, help !"

So fierce were her struggles, that the three men, strong as they were, had the greatest difficulty in holding her.

Again, her voice rang through the unresisting air. It fell upon John's ear as he sat with the companions of his orgie, holding a wine-glass in one hand, and beating time to a jovial song with the other.

All were instantly silent.

"Some scoundrel is ill-treating a woman, my lads !" exclaimed John ; " that's not exactly right ; suppose we go outside and interfere ? I don't like to hear a woman in distress, and I think we are only justified in interfering."

This suggestion was cordially approved of by the majority of those present. John, followed by several of his acquaintances, left the room, and ran into the road.

As he passed by the door, a stout stick, standing in a corner, caught his eye. He snatched it up, and was

prepared to do serious execution with it should he be called upon to do so.

In his hands, in his then condition, and on such an occasion, it was truly a dangerous weapon.

Guided by the cries, which became weaker and weaker, though they still continued at intervals, John reached the spot where Mildred was yet courageously struggling with her cowardly assailants.

When Alphonse and Saint-Roehe saw a formidable phalanx coming to her assistance, they deemed discretion the better part of valour, and took to their heels, which served them so admirably, as to enable them to distance their pursuers, and escape.

Gnashing his teeth with impotent fury and baffled rage, Mr. Vaillant flung Mildred's half-fainting body from him, and endeavoured to reach his brougham; but before he had taken two steps towards it, John Millington sprang upon him with a tigerish bound, and struck him a tremendous blow upon the head with the heavy stick he carried in his hand.

A groan escaped the Frenchman, as he fell insensible upon the granite road.

The light of the gas lamp was cast upon his upturned face, and with a cry of dismay, rather than of alarm or indignation, he saw that he had unwittingly attacked his friend.

Even as Othello believed Iago to be honest—most honest—so did John invariably suppose Varney to be his fast and true friend.

He fell upon one knee, and cried aghast, "Vaillant,

is it you? Have I done myself this injustice, and you so great a wrong? Now, I would give a thousand pounds I had sat still."

He had yet to learn that his wife was the lady whom he had delivered; he had yet to discover that he had happily rescued her from a hateful captivity and a detested thralldom infinitely worse than death.

When he apostrophized Vaillant's body, he had, in the sudden and self-accusing agony of his heart, spoken aloud.

Mildred, by this time, recovered herself, and distinguished the well-known tones of her husband's voice. One of those who had followed John from the tavern supported her, and carefully wiped the mud from her dress.

With a hysterical cry, she ran to John, and, putting her arm round his neck as he knelt, said, in a broken voice, now soft, now loud, "You have saved me! Do you not see who it is? Look at me! He cannot touch me now! I can laugh now, for you have saved me; and who should do so, but my husband?"

John turned round, perfectly stupified. He was sober enough for the moment. Events of the strangest and most romantic description were crowding upon him. His knight-errantry had revealed to him what he would have regarded as the wildest delusion, had he not seen it with his own eyes.

"Is he dead?" she asked, pointing to Vaillant, who did not stir.

John, in order to reply faithfully to this query

pushed and shook the body, but without eliciting the slightest sound to indicate that the vital spark yet burned, or glimmered faintly.

"Oh, Mildred!" he exclaimed; "although it is so clear and patent to the comprehension, I cannot bring myself to believe in the awful reality of what has just taken place. Vaillant may be dead. I know not what I have to fear; my only consolation is, that I have saved you from dishonour. Are you strong enough to walk?—if so, let us go. I must escape, or——" he broke off abruptly, adding, as he eyed his former friend half-angrily, half-remorsefully, "I hope he is not dead! Great powers! what have I done? If so—if the last breath has fled—then I am a murderer."

As this overwhelming reflection came upon him, he staggered against the lamp-post, covered his face with his hands, allowed his head to sink upon his breast, and appeared about to abandon himself to despair.

Mildred touched him lightly on the arm, whispering in his ear, "Come away, John! For my sake, as well as your own, come away! We can do this wretched man at our feet no good! The body will be shortly discovered by the police, and they will render him all the assistance in their power. Come, John; think of me and the little ones at home. There may be danger in staying longer."

He yielded to her solicitations, and reluctantly left the spot, with a raging fire at his heart, which no flood

of contrite tears could quench. Was not the brand of Cain upon his brow? Alas! there was just and reasonable ground to suppose so.

A very miserable walk home was that of John Millington and his wife. They were both agitated in the extreme. Mildred trembled like an aspen; and, at times, would have fallen, had it not been for the support he afforded her.

The noisy Bacchanals who had accompanied John from the public-house had long ago disappeared. The signal for this flight was Varney Vaillant's prolonged insensibility. They feared something serious, and did not wish to be implicated in an affair which had all the appearance of ending in an unpleasant manner.

When all her furniture was taken away, her home made desolate, Mildred thought her cup of affliction was full to the brim. But she had to learn a stern lesson of life, which teaches that, however gloomy the horizon may be, it can assume a darker hue—that however bad affairs are, it is within the bounds of possibility that they may become worse.

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## CHAPTER XV.

THIRZA IS AGAIN ENABLED TO SHOW HER SISTERLY  
AFFECTION FOR JOHN MILLINGTON.

SOME of the poor dwellers in the Colonnade had melody

in their souls. It is not the rich alone to whom the appreciation of sweet sounds is given. Their taste would have been all the better for cultivation, but their talent, such as it was, had so much merit in it, that it must not be despised.

These people formed themselves into a band of glee singers, and made money in the winter as waits.

Thirza had a very sweet voice. They would have called it a mezzo-soprano had they known the meaning of the Italian words; but as they did not, they left it nameless. She went out four nights a week with the waits, and roused the inhabitants of various districts from their sleep to listen to plaintive ballads, sacred songs, and primitive music.

It happened that she was singing in Pimlico on the night on which Varney Vaillant's design upon Mildred was signally defeated by a combination of circumstances against which all his cleverness was insufficient to guard.

The waits selected the very square in which the outrage was committed, and then Thirza, happening to cast her eyes about, let them fall upon the body of a man stretched out at full length upon the hard ground.

A scream uttered by her brought her companions to the spot, and they marvelled much what new villany the streets of London had given birth to.

In time the police came, and thinking the man was dead, as to all appearance he was, sent for a stretcher



to convey him to the hospital, where a medical opinion could be passed upon his condition.

Two detectives loitered round the spot afterwards, to glean all particulars, and pick up all crumbs they could, to enable them to come to some conclusion as to the author of the outrage, and the reason for its perpetration.

Actuated by that innate curiosity which all women possess in a large or small degree, Thirza lingered about, as did the rest of the waits. The public-house at the corner acted like a magnet upon most of the little crowd, and they proceeded thither, as did the detectives.

The landlord, a fussy old man of sixty-five, jocund and jovial, realizing the popular idea of Boniface and Simon the Cellarer, relieved his over-charged mind of all it contained relative to the murder—for such, by this time, it had come to be called.

He said that several gentlemen were drinking in his parlour; two went out, and four or five remained. Suddenly a woman's voice, crying for help, was distinctly heard. One of the gentlemen rushed out of the parlour, seizing a stout stick, as he did so, which lay in the corner of the passage. He was followed by the others—and that was all he knew.

The detectives asked him if he knew the gentleman with the stick. He replied in the negative, but added that he thought he heard the foreign-looking friend of his call him Millingfield, Millinghy, or Millington.

Which of the three did he think it was? He inclined

to the last, after some thought. The detectives called for a Directory, and found the name of Millington, John, High Park Terrace ; Millington, James Henry, Camberwell Road ; and Millington, Thomas, Marston Street, St. Pancras.

They determined to go to all three, and, for some occult reason, arranged to visit Millington, James Henry, first of all ; and one of the detectives set off for that purpose, while the other remained behind to gather any additional information which might be obtainable through vicarious channels.

How Thirza's heart beat when she heard the name of John Millington ! Was her preserver and benefactor in danger ? It would appear so. He rushed to the rescue of a woman, as he had, on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion, rushed to her rescue. It was possible that, in the frenzy of the moment, he had taken the life of a fellow-creature.

If so, it was undeniable that the police were on his track—for the few words she had heard in the tavern were sufficient to convince her of that ; in a few hours they would be knocking at his door, and dragging him forcibly from the bosom of his wife and family.

Her duty was plain, under the circumstances. If, as the police suspected, he was guilty of the crime of murder, it was her duty to remain quiescent, and give no word of warning to him whom justice claimed as her own—to acquit or not, as the evidence might direct.

Those who are good-hearted are seldom inclined to

assist justice—they prefer to let justice do her own work. They have, as a rule, a feeling of pity for the criminal, which becomes intensified if they are acquainted with him.

We know that this is wrong. It is very wishy-washy and sentimental. It is the offspring of a perverted sense. Thirza, however, cast duty to the winds. She cared nothing for her obligations to society and the community at large. It was sufficient for her that John, for whom she had imbibed a sisterly affection was in danger.

The detective's back was scarcely turned, than she said to the leader of the waits, "I don't feel well to-night, Thomas. You must not mind if I go home."

"Go back home!" he said, in surprise.

"Yes; I must, indeed. The shock of finding the body has given me such a splitting headache."

"I don't know how we shall get on without you, your clear voice seems to go right through walls, and roof, and all. Those that are asleep can hear you when they can't us. Don't go, Thirza."

"I must, Thomas. It isn't often I desert you;" replied Thirza; "but I can't stay to-night on any consideration."

"Well, I am sorry for it. We shall leave off all the earlier, that's all," he rejoined, sulkily.

Thirza gave him a nod, and tripped off in the direction of High Park Terrace, to warn John to fly from the hounds of justice, which would soon be baying at his heels.

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When John reached his wretched home, Clara, who was on the watch, let him and his wife in. It was a cold, damp night, and she had lighted a fire in the room in which the children slept. Their limited means would not allow them to have more than one fire at a time.

Into this room she led the way.

The children were sleeping placidly, unconscious of all the troubles which surrounded their afflicted parents. John, half-stupified with grief and the effects of drink, which had only partially evaporated, sank into a chair. His wife bent over him, and endeavoured to raise his drooping spirits.

Clara went to the mattress, on which the children were lying, and arranged the scanty covering which they had removed in turning over restlessly, roused by the noise made by John, as he entered. The fire had burnt out. A wretched deal table supported a stick, in which a candle was burning low down in the socket. The chair in which John was sitting, and a stool, were all the furniture that the room could boast.

When the children had fallen off asleep again, Clara approached her sister-in-law, and said in a hushed tone, "What has happened? Why did they send for you?"

"Oh, Clara!" Mildred replied, sadly; "I had hoped that you would not ask me. The story is too dreadful for recital."

"Tell me, I can bear it all," was the determined reply.

"In that case, you shall hear what I have to say. The letter I received was written by Mr. Vaillant<sup>t</sup> who waylaid me in a lonely square, and endeavoured to force me into a brougham."

"I always took him for a villain!" ejaculated Clara.

"Your estimate of his character was a correct one. Fortunately, I contrived to cry out and call assistance. Strange as it may appear, John was drinking in a tavern hard by; and he, hearing my screams, rushed to my assistance, and, without knowing whom he struck, or whom he succoured, felled Vaillant to the ground."

"Is he dead?" asked Clara. "Oh! heaven forbid that so great a trouble should fall upon us—we are overwhelmed already!"

"I fear he is; he looked so cold and still as he lay upon the road," replied Mildred. "I very much fear he is dead—that is my great trouble. The fright I have undergone is as nothing, compared with the peril in which John stands."

"I can now understand the reason of Mr. Vaillant's civility, generosity, and kindness," exclaimed Clara. "He was desirous of creating a good impression on your mind, and instilling confidence in you. I am sincerely rejoiced that his design was defeated; and, though he deserves the severest punishment, I do hope, for John's sake, and for our sakes, that he may not be dead."

Mildred could not weep, just then ; her eyes had sunk into her head, and were burning like two live coals, and all around was hot and dry. Better would it have been for her if nature could have its way, and tears had fallen.

The danger through which she had passed, and the danger which still menaced them, made her a heroine. Some would have been utterly prostrated, but she acquired a species of fictitious strength which enabled her to go successfully through the trying ordeal. Without flinching from the question, or changing a muscle of her earnest face, she asked : "Suppose the officers come here, and take John, what will be done with him?"

"He will be imprisoned for a long term of years—perhaps for life," returned Clara, who was in no humour to disguise the truth, or make things look better than they were.

"Oh, no—no ! That must not happen to him ! Anything but that !" cried Mildred, passionately. "How dreadful to know that your husband—the man whom you love more dearly than anything in the whole world—is confined between four walls, in a narrow cell, unable to enjoy intellectual communication with any one ; not allowed to see or read a book ; compelled to perform menial and degrading labour ! Oh, the picture is too terrible and repulsive ! I cannot dwell upon it ! Come what may, Clara, we must save him from that !"

"What are you saying?" exclaimed John, whose

faculties were not so deadened as to prevent him from hearing what was said by his wife.

"We were talking about you, John," said Clara. "If you do not wish to be arrested for the murder of Mr. Vaillant, I am sorely afraid you must fly at once."

He roused himself at this, and said, in a hollow, sepulchral voice, "Fly! It's all very well to say that, but where am I to fly to?"

"That's a problem," she answered.

"Heaven knows what is to become of me!" sighed John, in a pusillanimous tone. "I know I have been bad and vicious; but the bad luck I have had would conquer a dozen men. Any one but I could knock down a man who was insulting a woman, and the blow would not injure him much. The fact is, the sooner I am out of the world the better!"

"Now you are talking sheer nonsense!" said Clara, who was still the stern monitress. "If you are arrested and charged with the commission of a capital crime, the grand jury will not call it anything but 'Manslaughter.' You may be imprisoned for life, but you will not escape from the world. You need not flatter yourself with so cowardly and deceptive an idea."

Clara was beginning to dislike John; and the acrimonious tone in which she spoke sufficiently revealed the fact. His character really was an unpleasant one to dwell upon in many respects; and when she thought of the shocking state to which he had reduced her and

his family, she could not tolerate him.

"I have no money," said John, as if talking to himself,—*"I have no friends. They say I have killed Varney. What on earth I am to do, is to me a mystery."*

At this moment, there was a timid knock at the door.

All started, and listened for a repetition of the summons. It occurred to one and all that the officers of justice were outside.

John was like a man paralyzed in mind and body; Mildred was so faint with apprehension, that she was incapable of moving.

Clara was the only one of the three who retained an atom of self-possession.

"I will go to the door," she exclaimed; "and if the worst comes to the worst, I cannot help it!"

"Oh, stay where you are!" said Mildred, imploringly.

"What is the use of that?" responded Clara. "If I stay here, the door will be broken down; and——"

"What?"

"After all, it may not be the police."

Here was a straw for a drowning man to catch at.

"It may not, certainly," Mildred replied. "Who but they, though, would think of coming at this time of night? It must be nearly three o'clock in the morning."

Again the timid knock was heard, followed by a gentle ring.



"There it is again. What am I to do?" cried Clara.

"I really don't know," answered Mildred. "Do the best you can; I am half distracted. Touch John on the shoulder. Ask him whether he does not think he can escape by the back-door."

"John!" said Clara, laying her hand upon his arm.

He looked up, and stared idiotically in her face—as if his thoughts were far away, and he could not bring them back all at once.

"John!" she repeated.

"Well, what do you want?—are they here? Do they wish to take me away at once? Let me kiss my wife and children first!" he said, vacantly.

It was difficult to wake him from his state of abstraction. When she had done so, he jumped up, and said, "Some one at the door, is there? Do you think it is the police? Is the house surrounded?"

"I don't know what to think; but I have the gravest apprehensions."

"I will go down stairs, with you; and if I hear you call to me, I shall know it is a friend—if not, I shall escape in the best way I can!" he exclaimed.

Going to Mildred, he kissed her tenderly, though his gait was unsteady, and his intoxication had not nearly worn off.

"Heaven bless you!" he cried—"heaven bless you, my poor, dear wife! Let us hope for the best. Pray for strength to bear this trial—the hardest you have been called upon to undergo! Kiss my children for me,

darling innocents ! It is one consolation to think that they are ignorant of all my wickedness !”

When he talked kindly to her, and when she thought he was going away from her, the flood-gates of Mildred’s heart were loosened, and her tears fell thick and fast, like summer rain upon parched soil.

“Dear John, you must not leave me,” Mildred replied, through her tears. “I must share your exile. Let me ; take me with you !”

“No, no—I cannot !” he said, while a spasm crossed his face. “You will only hamper me. I know not where I am going. I am an outcast ; I have no place to lay my head. Stay here with Clara. You shall hear from me.”

Sinking into the chair which John had just vacated, Mildred gave way to the most passionate grief.

Clara was already more than half-way down the stairs ; pressing his lips against his wife’s marble forehead, John hurried after her, and gaining the end of the passage, stood there awaiting Clara’s signal, his heart palpitating wildly, and his whole frame trembling with excitement.

When the door was opened, what was Clara’s astonishment to perceive the poor flower-girl standing on the steps !

“What do you want ?” she asked, with some asperity yet feeling unutterable relief.

“If you please, miss, can I see the master ?” replied Thirza.

“I don’t think you can. What is your business ?”

"Oh, it is very important ! Pray, let me see him

"Very important?"

"Yes."

"Cannot you tell me?"

"No ; but I will tell his wife. If I cannot see Mr. Millington, perhaps his good lady will see me?"

While Clara was deliberating as to what answer she should make, John came forward. He had recognised the flower-girl's voice, and he knew that she was his friend, so he fearlessly approached her.

"You asked to see me, did you not?" he said.

"Yes, sir. I have only half-a-dozen words to speak, and will not detain you," replied Thirza.

"Come in, my child," answered John. "We cannot converse with the door open."

Thirza entered ; and John, seeing the terrible reality of his position, placed his pride on one side, and led the way into the room in which Mildred was.

Clara shrugged her shoulders at this ; but she had been compelled to put up with so many humiliations of late, that she wondered whether she would have any pride left, unless some change speedily occurred.

Thirza made a curtsy to Mildred, who looked oddly at her.

"Now," said John, "I shall be glad to hear what you have to say."

"I was out singing, to-night, with the waits, sir, and, coming through a large square in Pimlico, I saw a man's body lying in the road !"

John smiled sadly. Clearly, Nemesis was at his heels.

"Some detectives came up, and I followed them to a tavern, and listened to their conversation. Suspicion pointed to a person of the name of Millington as the murderer of the man whom I had seen. On reference to the Directory, it was found that there were three Millingtons; one of whom resided in the Camberwell Road. The detectives decided upon going there first, but they will be here shortly; and I hope you will pardon me, sir, for coming to tell you what I had seen and heard. I am sure I hope you are not the person they are in search of. If you are, my warning may help you to escape."

"You are mistaken, my good girl. This gentleman is not what you suppose him to be," exclaimed Clara, whose rebellious temper led her into the utterance of a falsehood, for which, an hour afterwards, she, on her knees, begged heaven's pardon, with hot, scalding tears of contrition.

"Hush, Clara!" John said, in a tone of rebuke. "Do not screen me at the expense of the truth." Turning to Thirza, he added, "Unfortunately, I did strike a man, about an hour and a half ago, but I did not intend to kill him. He was insulting a lady—that lady was my wife, as I afterwards discovered. I know I am in fault, but not nearly so much as people, at the first blush, may be inclined to think me."

"The ruffian deserved chastisement, sir," said Thirza. "But, if I might make so bold, I should advise you to hasten away, and find shelter somewhere."

Clara, abashed, had withdrawn into the corner in which the children were lying, and, pretending to be absorbed with her thoughts, she remained passive, though she listened attentively to every word that was spoken.

"Where is he to go?" said Mildred.

"I live in a quiet, retired part of London, ma'am," replied Thirza. "If you would not mind your husband coming with me, I could introduce him to a picture-dealer, a few doors from my sister's, who has a room to let, at three shillings a week."

"Would he be safe there?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. He would be safer there than at any other place, for I would represent him as a poor man out of work, and get him some work to do in the smithy."

"Oh, no, he could not descend to that," said Mildred, with an expression of dissatisfaction.

"Why not?" John replied. "Is it not getting a living in an honest way? There is a prospect of worse than that before me."

"But your talents ——"

"Are useless, and may be thrown away utterly. I will accept this girl's kind offer. You must not come near me—that would lead to suspicion. If any one comes after me, say I have gone abroad. Boulogne, Calais, Dieppe—any place will answer your purpose. Deny everything they may suggest to you. Thirza will be the means of communication between us."

And so the matter was arranged.

Shortly afterwards, John and Thirza stole out of the house, and made their way to Bloomsbury. The waits had just arrived, and were drinking some beer in the "Lord Raglan," their exertions having placed them in need of some refreshment.

The son of the picture-dealer, whom Thirza had mentioned as having a room to let, was amongst them ; his name was Fred, and his father, Andrew Webspinner, was dotingly fond of him. He was a young man of five-and-twenty, and much attached to Thirza, who, however, did not reciprocate his affection, and always repelled his advances whenever she had a chance of so doing.

Frederick Webspinner was a draughtsman of moderate ability. He contrived to make a living by architectural drawing, and received something worth having from advertising tradesmen who wished to introduce designs of new bedsteads, coal-scuttles, kettles, glass bottles, tumblers, garden-chairs, steam ploughs, ironwork contrivances, and the hundred and one things which are continually being invented and patented by enterprising shop-keepers.

It was necessary to be polite to Fred on that particular morning, because she knew that Andrew Webspinner would not think of talking about business until after eight o'clock, which was his usual time for awakening.

Asking John to wait outside the tavern, she entered it, and accosted Fred, who, a little hoarse with his efforts in the vocal art, was endeavouring to ease his

throat with copious draughts of beer.

"So you have found your way home at last!"

"Yes; I am better now," she replied. "I shall start for the market in a moment; but I have something to say to you."

"The more the merrier! What is it?"

"I have found you a lodger."

"Indeed! What is he?"

"A very respectable man, who is badly off now. I saw him looking for a lodging, and I recommended him to you," replied Thirza.

"Well, tell him to come to my father in the morning," said Fred. "He can make himself comfortable on the door-step for the next three hours."

"Take him in, Fred—I want you to."

"Will you give me a kiss if I do?" asked Fred.

"A kiss! Certainly not! Why should I? Am I not doing you a favour? You know your room has been empty six weeks."

"So it has. Well, to oblige you, I will let him in with my key," said Fred. "Has he got his rent, though? Father always likes to have that in advance."

"He will give it you early in the morning. Don't hurt his feelings by asking for it now," replied Thirza.

"Bring him in; it shall be all right," said Fred Webspinner, who was, in his heart, glad of an opportunity of obliging the pretty and unassuming flower-girl.

Thirza opened the door, and beckoned to John. As he passed her, she slipped a shilling into his hand, and, pushing him forward, said, "Here's your lodger, Fred. His name's Mill. I shall leave you to arrange everything between you, for I must be off to market, or what flowers there are will have vanished before I get there."

With a kindly nod, she disappeared, and the men were left face to face.

John was the first to speak.

"I am afraid you must have a poor opinion of me," he said.

"Why?" asked Fred.

"Simply for coming after a lodging at this time in the morning. I have had——"

"Pray, don't make a single excuse or apology," replied Fred. "Thirza Martin's recommendation is quite sufficient. There isn't a better girl in the Colonnade than she is—no, not in all London—and everybody knows it. I'd make her my wife to-morrow, if she'd have me."

"Would you?" asked John.

"Would I!—didn't I say so? What will you have before we shut our eyes?"

"Take something with me," said John.

"Oh, yes! if you like! I'm not at all proud. Only I have some work to do to-morrow, and if I don't turn in quickly, I shall be very much behind-hand."

John paid for some beer, and then they left the



tavern, turned down the Colonnade, and entered the picture-dealer's shop. It was nearly daylight, and John did not care about having a candle. Fred showed him his bedroom, apologized for the absence of sheets, and promised to call him as soon as he himself was awake.

Thanking him for his kindness, John threw off his clothes, covered himself with the blankets, and, with a heavy heart, sank to rest.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### SANCTUARY.

MUCH as he would, in the days of prosperity, have despised a place like the Colonnade, John Millington was glad to find shelter there when the clouds of adversity encompassed him.

Thirza made him acquainted with her brother-in-law, and Jack Pothacary gave him, or, more strictly speaking, obtained him, employment at the highly remunerative rate of a shilling a day.

His occupation consisted in assisting to shoe horses in the smithy, blowing the bellows, sweeping up the yard, drawing water, and making himself generally useful in many ways. Being thoroughbred, he did not object to this rough and ready way of gaining a livelihood ; he would have done anything to save himself from prison. He would have assisted in the

labours of Hercules, killed a Lernæan hydra, or cleansed an Augean stable. The idea of passing the remainder of his days in gaol was so galling and humiliating that he could not bear to think of it.

Andrew Webspinner did not object to his lodger. He paid his rent, and that was sufficient for him. Being brought into the house by his son, did away with the necessity for a reference, and so John found sanctuary.

Fred's father was a dealer in works of art, and sold old-fashioned pictures, which he represented to be by the best masters ; but they were, in the majority of cases, nothing better than impudent forgeries.

There are some gentlemen who like a picture shop if it is an out-of-the-way place, and Andrew Webspinner had many an aristocratic customer who would walk up to the Colonnade when they would not have ventured into a more fashionable locality. Their idea was that they might pick up, for an old song something worth a large sum of money ; and this is a prevalent delusion amongst a certain class of picture buyers.

A cleverly imitated Vandermulin, or a Gainsborough, carefully copied, is eagerly bought by the self-taught, who, after all, are only half-taught. Small Teniers,' little scraps by Hunt, an old panel painting by Rembrandt—such as a Rabbi in his robes, or a stately Israelite with a long beard, gloating over a bag of money,—these have charms for the possessors of small galleries.

Fred was an excellent copyist, though he had little

original talent. Cruickshank was a favourite master of his, and he would make innumerable copies of his quaint, fantastic sketches. These the elder Webspinner would place in his window without signatures, declare he bought them at a sale, and let his patrons take them on their own judgment and responsibility.

When he wished to turn a modern painting into an old one, he placed it in a drawer, and putting a pipe through a hole in it, smoked it black with strong tobacco. A thousand subterfuges had Andrew Webspinner, to deceive the unwary. Even as fish are taken with artificial flies, so were the public trapped by his specious simulations.

There are always clever men, artists by profession, whose talent is unrecognised, and who are glad to make copies from celebrated paintings; of these, Andrew knew a complete phalanx, and by their industry contrived to prosper.

One day, when Fred was at work in the shop, John came in with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, eating some bread and cheese; he looked over his shoulder, and saw that he was making an architectural drawing. Some defect in it immediately caught his experienced eye; he pointed it out to Fred, who, a little nettled, said, "Perhaps you can do it better?"

"I'll try, if you like," said John.

Fred made room for him, and in five minutes time had the satisfaction of seeing himself eclipsed and thrown into the shade, by a man who was making a shilling a-day by hard drudgery.

"If you can draw like that," he exclaimed, "it will be worth my while to give you ten shillings a-day, and board and lodge you in the bargain," he exclaimed. "With such a talent, what possesses you to occupy yourself as you do?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied John, carelessly; "we are all creatures of circumstances."

After that, Fred insisted upon John turning his thoughts into a more ambitious, and his talents into a more profitable, channel. He was occupied in-doors, and did a great deal of architectural drawing, for which he was well, if not extravagantly, paid.

Through Thirza's instrumentality, he frequently corresponded with his wife, and sent her money. He heard that the police had visited his house shortly after he had gone away, and that they were on the look-out for him in every direction.

Varney Vaillant was reported to be hovering between life and death in a London hospital. At one time his death was momentarily expected, at another, he rallied; and so the balance of life continued to fluctuate, first on one way, and then the other, though many skilful physicians inclined to the belief that he must succumb to the effects of the frightful injury he had received.

For a fortnight, John defied the efforts of the detectives, who hunted everywhere in vain for him; but on the fifteenth day, elated with success, and burning to spend some money in his pocket, which Frederick Webspinner had given him for his work, he entered a

public-house, and once more indulged freely in his favourite vice.

The landlord in High Park Terrace did not take measures immediately to eject Mrs. Millington and her family ; he was merciful, to a certain extent, and gave them a little time to enable them to apply to their friends, and make other necessary arrangements. He fancied that, miserable as they were, it would be impossible for them to tolerate so wretched a state of affairs for any length of time.

They contrived to maintain themselves by the aid of the money which Thirza brought them from John, in addition to which, the generous girl frequently gave them a portion of her own hard earnings. Clara was skilled at Berlin wool work, and her needle was ever busy. Her industry was wonderful ; but, on Saturday, she had her reward, for she took her work to a dealer in such feminine nicknacks, and he paid her for what she offered for sale in sterling coin of the realm.

Mildred always sent kind messages to John by Thirza, who was a faithful messenger. Sometimes she found consolation in writing letters. They were mostly in the following strain :—

“MY OWN, MY DEAREST ONE,—

“I have but little cheering information to give you to cheer you in your exile. The children are well, and Clara does not seem to suffer from the hard work she incessantly inflicts upon herself. I am, thank goodness, also in the enjoyment of good health—though I

am constrained to admit that I am at times dreadfully low-spirited.

“I sometimes ask myself when all this is to end—what is to become of us? Will you ever be able to hold up your head in society in this country again? I fear not. Pray don’t imagine for a moment that I say this for the purpose of discouraging you—on the contrary. My maxim is, when danger beset you, look it boldly in the face, and in that way shall you conquer it. Now we are environed by danger, and our only chance of escape is by meeting it courageously, not by shutting our eyes and avoiding it.

“Oh! how joyous should I be, if by some miracle we obtain a sum of money sufficient to enable us to go to Australia. In a new world, you might be able to begin life anew; and if you could not obtain employment as a draughtsman or artist, you would always be able to fall back upon the gold-diggings. Being a strong, muscular man, you could afford to lay aside your gentility, and set to work in earnest.

“There is no trial however severe—no hardship however great—no peril, however terrifying, but which I would cheerfully undergo in your society. There are occasions when I sit for hours in a reverie, dreaming my day-dream—hoping for the best, and trying to have faith in a glorious future. How sad my awakening is I need not tell you. Have you ever walked in the smiling, flower-carpeted fields on a sunny day, and suddenly lost your brilliant sunshine owing to the interference of a dark and gloomy cloud, how changed is

everything in a moment. The pretty landscape is disenchanted—the insects in the grass cease to hum—the spotted snake glides to its hole—the birds attune their voices mournfully—a cold breeze whistles harshly through the hedges, and the branches of the murmuring trees—the gaudy butterflies fold their flimsy wings, and seek a place of shelter.

“Such is the gloom which overshadows my soul when I am recalled to the stern necessities and sad realities of my wretched work-a-day life. You will scold me, and say that I am but a poor comforter; yet I must not be denied the luxury of communing with you, and letting you participate in my troubles.

“At the risk of reiteration, I must once more speak of emigration. Is there no way of collecting money enough to go away from England; I have heard of such things as ‘assisted’ passages; could not we be assisted? Think over this, dear John, for it seems to me, that, like Sinbad, in the cave, I see a little glimmering spark of light in the distance—so faint, so shadowy, but, nevertheless, light.

“Think carefully, and believe me yours ever fondly,

MILDRED.”

When Thirza arrived at the Colonnade, she found John in a very palpable state of intoxication in the “Lord Raglan,” at the top of the Mews. She had never had the misfortune to see him in this degraded condition before. He could not speak coherently. He had not a rational idea in his head. As Cassio says, he had

“put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains.” His appearance was untidy, not to say unclean. His gait was tremulous—his language, if not actually bad, was such as should never pass the lips of a gentleman, or one having the slightest pretensions to gentility.

How was her hero degraded ! How was her idol shattered ! She endeavoured to take him away from the scene of his orgie, but he laughed vacantly at her. In sheer vexation of heart, the little maiden ran away, and, sitting down in a secluded corner of the Colonnade, put her hands up to her face, and cried passionately.

Perhaps it occurs to every girl, during some part of her career, to have an idol, or a supposed realization of an ideal. They feel more veneration than love. If love is mingled with their worship, it is of a pure, innocent, sisterly description. Some young ladies will kneel at the shrine of a popular preacher ; others at that of a talented actor ; very many have unlimited admiration for none but an author ; others, again, find the realization of their ideal in a mighty captain, who has won battles ; a few do not travel out of the family circle—they have a gifted friend, whose talents charm them into obedience to his will, and they do him homage, thinking every word that falls from his lips a pearl of wisdom.

When Thirza had wept to her full contentment, she retired to rest.

John was not stirring early ; he had to sleep off the



fumes of the liquors he had imbibed. Not to deprive him of the treat of reading a letter from his wife, the flower-girl, with a good-nature peculiarly her own, made that day what, in the parlance of the trade, is called the home circuit—that is, she frequented the spacious squares, and quiet, retired streets of old world Bloomsbury, which enabled her at one o'clock to re-enter the Colonnade.

John was standing near the smithy door, talking languidly to Jack Pothacary. Fred Webspinner was hammering away at a horseshoe on the anvil for the sake of exercise.

“Ah, my little Flora,” cried Fred, when he saw Thirza,—“what present have you for me to-day? The last rose of summer, or the first chrysanthemum of autumn.”

“If I give you a peony, will it make you blush for your impudence?”

“I am afraid not. We are not of a blushing family ; it isn't recorded in the chronicles of the house of Web-spinner,” he said, with a laugh.

“How are you, to-day?” Thirza exclaimed to John.

“Indifferently well, thank you,” he replied, rather bashfully. “I was silly enough last night to indulge a little too freely.”

His face crimsoned, and she noticed this fact with pleasure, because she firmly believed that where there is shame there may be reformation.

“I have a letter for you.”

“Indeed ! Pray give it me.”

She handed him the epistle, which he eagerly tore open, and read carefully from beginning to end. The suggestion of his wife sunk into his mind, and he pondered it deeply. Australia! It seemed a watchword pregnant with hope. Did it not, rightly interpreted, embrace freedom, liberty of mind as well as body; a happy land, "where a man is a man, if he's willing to toil." Could it not be made the sepulchre of the old world, from which a new birth might spring? It was veritably a land of promise.

While he was thinking, oblivious of all around him, Fred exclaimed, "What would you do to yourself, Jack, if you took so much overnight that you could not listen to a good offer the next morning?"

"What would I do? Why, take the pledge," replied Jack Pothacary. "No, no! I like a drop as well as anybody, but I have my limit, beyond which I won't go—no, not for anybody."

"Well," continued Fred, "there's our friend Mill, there, so shaky that a good job's going a-begging. I know he's clever enough to do what a friend of mine wants done; I admit that I am not. There is no false pride about me, and I don't mind confessing it."

"What's the job?" inquired Jack Pothacary blowing away with the bellows until the fire blazed and crackled like one of Vulcan's fabled forges.

"It is only to make half-a-dozen drawings, and for that he would have a hundred guineas."

"What!" cried Jack, in amazement, "and he won't do it?"

"It does not look like it. I am sure if he kept sober he might do them in a week, and do them well, too."

Suddenly, John struck his forehead with his clenched fist. He had an idea. Touching Fred upon the shoulder, he exclaimed, "I'll do it! Go and tell your friend so. Promise him the drawings on Friday night."

"That will only give you three days," replied Fred incredulously.

"Nights!—you forget the nights!"

"Still——"

"Trust me. If I say it shall be done, I will keep my word. I shall be all right presently. In an hour I will begin, and make the rough sketches."

Fred shrugged his shoulders. Washing his hands and face under a pump in the yard, he put on his coat, and went away. He expected to be paid a good commission by John, and he intended to take the credit of the drawings himself, so he was anxious to let John work while he was in the humour.

And now, what was John's idea?

He thought that the money he was to receive would, with some slight assistance from the Government agent, enable him and his family to go to Australia. Of course, Clara would remain behind, for she was engaged to Leonard, who might bring her over in time to join his or her relations or not, in his discretion.

There would only be Mildred, himself, and the two children, not an expensive party, surely, to convey to the antipodes. Full of this conception, he sat down and indited the following answer to his wife's letter :—

“DEAREST MILDRED,—

“Your suggestion respecting emigration is a very excellent one. It presents, as you truly say, a way out of all our difficulties. I am happy to say that I have a chance of obtaining a hundred pounds within three days. Let Clara go—if she will be kind enough—to the offices of the Emigration Commissioners, which is somewhere in Westminster, and ascertain if the sum I have mentioned is sufficient to take a man, his wife, and two children to Adelaide. Ask her, in a word, to find out all particulars. If we find that the idea is feasible, it shall be carried out at once. My heart palpitates so with expectations and anxious hope, that I can scarcely breathe. Let this be done with as much rapidity as possible.

“Your loving husband,

JOHN MILLINGTON.”

The work came in the afternoon, and John tackled it courageously. He was a persistent worker when sober, and nothing could stay his industrious hand. In the evening Thirza brought news from the hospital. Varney Vaillant was still hanging between life and death, as Mahomet's coffin is suspended between earth and heaven,

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE LOSS OF THE LETTER.

THE gas, and the glare, and the glitter !

It is the birthday of a member of the royal family, and the Court tradesmen are lighting up the fronts of their shops. Brilliant, indeed, is the illumination. The fashionable streets of the west end are thronged by eager sight-seers, who stop in little knots before each blazing star, burning plume of feathers, fiery crown, and gaudy initial letter, uttering cries of astonishment and delight at anything novel or particularly worthy of notice.

The gas, and the glare, and the glitter !

The giddy crowd grows thicker and yet more dense every moment. Loyal enthusiasm breaks forth in loud shouts of admiration. The streets are blocked up with carriages containing fashionable people, who have brought wine, beer, and cold collations with them, as if they were going to a picnic. Every one is merry, and deriving enjoyment from the gay and animated scene.

The gas, the glare, and the glitter !

Very difficult is locomotion in the over-crowded thoroughfares. Pedestrians, in some instances, stand in imminent danger of their lives. The weak went literally to the wall, and with unpleasant violence. Yet there was a sight to be seen, and the people had

come out to see it ; moreover, it was gratuitous, and therefore more agreeable to the mass of the public, who know how to appreciate that which costs them nothing.

In the middle of Piccadilly, where the mob was thickest, Thirza, the flower-girl, was endeavouring to push her away with a perseverance that did her infinite credit. Her basket was nearly empty ; a few bunches remained, but the flowers were drooping for want of water. She did not attempt to sell them ; her only wish seemed to be to obtain egress from the crowd.

The most haste, the worse speed.

It was so in her case ; for the more she pushed, the greater became the opposition. Unfortunately, she was not going with the stream of people ; to cross over to the opposite side was dangerous, if not impossible. Altogether, she was in a most unpleasant dilemma.

Her basket hung over her left arm ; in her right, she carried a letter. Close behind her was an old man of respectable appearance, who followed in her footsteps, and did not allow her to get out of his sight.

At length, as if pitying, and wishing to assist her in overcoming the difficulties with which she was beset, he offered her his arm, saying, " I see we are both going in the same direction ; for some time I have been watching your ineffectual attempts to break through the mob ; if you will take my arm, I may be of some service to you."

"Thank you !" she replied, regarding him timidly. "I shall be glad to accept your offer for a short time. I had no idea that there was an illumination to-night, or I should have selected a quieter way. When I come to a side street, I shall turn up it, and then everything will be easy."

"As you please," said the old man.

They contrived, by their united exertions, to push their way for some hundred yards ; then they came to a side street, at the corner of which there was a great rush, which separated the flower-girl from her friend. When she extricated herself from the human whirlpool she uttered a cry of dismay ; for the letter which she carried in her right hand had either fallen from it, or been snatched from her by some mischievous person.

In vain she walked backwards and forwards, prying eagerly into every gap in the crowd. She could not see the slightest trace of the missing epistle. At last, giving up the search in despair, and unable again to meet with her some time protector, she walked up a quiet street, sat down upon a door-step, and wept bitterly.

The cause of her grief was this :—

John Millington had entrusted her with the delivery of a letter to his wife. He had rejoined her to be especially careful with it, as it contained matter of the last importance. Having lost it in the crowd, she could not tell into what hands it might fall. Being ignorant of the vocations and dispositions of the

people, she was compelled to regard them all as Philistines.

John had given Mildred full and complete information respecting his emigration scheme. If this were to become the property of the police, or any one connected with them, John and his family would be utterly ruined.

This is what he wrote :—

“EVER DEAREST MILDRED,—

“I have succeeded in obtaining the money I spoke of in my last communication to you ; and I have done more than that. I went to the Docks to-day, and had an interview with the captain of the ship *Morumbidgee*, bound for Adelaide. A cabin was vacant, and I secured it, paid a deposit on the passage-money, and arranged everything. The vessel starts upon her voyage the day after to-morrow, at eleven o’clock in the morning, dropping down the river with the tide. Have everything in readiness, and meet me, darling, at the foot of the Monument, on Fish Street Hill, at nine, when I will conduct you to the Dock in which the ship is lying.

“Praying that heaven may bless you, believe me, my dear, dear wife, your fond and devoted husband,

“JOHN MILLINGTON.”

Thirza knew the contents of this letter, because John had shown it to her before he placed it in its



envelope. She was sufficiently sensible to see that if it fell into the enemy's hands it would utterly and completely betray him; and for John to be betrayed by her was a possibility that carried gall and wormwood with it in its faintest sound.

Whenever despair is blackest, the little twinkling star of hope, unclouded and unextinguished, glimmers brightly in the distance.

In her hour of misery, Thirza's hope was that the letter might be trampled into illegible pulp by the many feet that, if upon the ground, would be constantly walking over it. In its destruction was John's salvation.

Having checked her burst of sorrow, she continued her journey, and arriving at High Park Terrace, informed Mildred of what had happened, and made her acquainted with the instructions John had put upon paper.

Mildred was overjoyed at the pleasing intelligence, and felt persuaded that the letter had dropped to the ground, and been pounded into impalpable dust by a thousand pattering feet. She told the flower-girl to inform her husband that she would meet him as he requested, and dismissing the messenger with thanks, hurried away to share her joy with Clara.

As a matter of course, Clara was very much pleased to hear of so capital and unexpected a solution of the difficulty in which her friends were placed, but she felt sorry to part from Mildred, whose faithful companion she had been for so long a time.

To share the joys and the sorrows of a dear friend—to mingle your heart with his in the fresh spring-tide of youth, and afterwards, in more mature years, to understand the actual and practical meaning of the word “friendship” in its purest and most refined sense—is to lay up for oneself a frightful amount of intense and terrible suffering when the day of separation comes.

It is not in the nature of things that dear friends can live together, or be in constant communication with one another all their lives. It may happen so, but only exceptionally. No letter can ever possess the charm of that which is uttered by word of mouth. If death be the fatal hatchet which cuts asunder the adamantine, and yet, paradoxical as it may sound, the pre-eminently fragile bonds of amity, then the suffering to the survivor is all the more acute.

Clara began to feel her eyes suffused with tears, for a short time her emotion was such, that she could not speak. She held Mildred's hand in hers, and pressed it with spasmodic tenderness.

“Oh! I shall miss you!” she said, at length, “My fortitude is not proof against such a trial.”

“But remember, dear, that the change in our circumstances is all for the best. John is so unfortunately situated, that, for him to remain here, is to be continually exposed to the most dreadful degradation.”

“If Leonard were only here!” ejaculated Clara, raising her hands, and clasping them together.

“Ah! it is in a crisis like the present that we miss

his sound and wholesome advice. His presence, just now, would be invaluable."

"It would, indeed. I cannot imagine why he does not write. I hope he is not ill," Clara said, while an expression of pain suffused her face at the bare thought of his being laid upon a bed of sickness.

"I trust not," Mildred replied. "I recollect he stated, in one of his letters, that he was going into the interior of Portugal, and that postal communication was extremely irregular between some of the inland towns and the ports."

"I must leave here when you go," Clara exclaimed; "and yet I know not where to go."

"John will give you some money when you see us off at the dock. You can come back here for a night. What a pity it is you cannot accompany us."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Clara; "I could never come back here. The recollections of bygone days with which this house is peopled would, were I solitary, drive me into a lunatic asylum. With money I can find a harbour of refuge, I have no doubt, and I can maintain myself by Berlin wool-work until Leonard's return, when the 'winter of our discontent' will be changed into 'glorious summer.' Don't trouble yourself about me, dear Mildred; I am not a tyro in the ways of the world. You and I have graduated in an excellent school to enable us to grapple with the solid difficulties with which we are beset."

She smiled hopefully. Who will deny that she was a heroine? Boadicea, the Maid of Orleans, Charlotte

Corday, Florence Nightingale—these have their places in history ; but Clara, bravely fighting a fight against fate—holding her own against immense odds, may well be classed amongst those who compose that noble army of women, who command the respect and admiration of all to whom their story is known.

The British Queen, smarting beneath the blows of the invaders, driving the Roman legions into the sea ; the public-spirited peasant-girl, reorganizing a beaten army, and leading it successfully against those who had formerly made it fly in disorder ; the patriotic maiden, driving the steel home in the heart of the tyrant ; the self-sacrificing, patient, gentle-hearted lady, bending over the hospital beds, and comforting and ministering to the victims of mismanagement and horrid war, form a quartette unparalleled.

But this is a heroine that makes no sign—very quiet, very passive, and very admirable is it. Let us call it the heroism of the hearth and home—the heroism of the fire-side, and perchance of the empty grate.

This heroism begins often in childhood, and continues through the long years of life.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with magnificent pathos, wrote about the sorrows of the young, saying :—

“Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers ?

Ere the sorrow comes with years.

They are leaning their young heads against their  
mothers,

And *that* cannot stop their tears.

"The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,  
The young birds are chirping in the nest,  
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,  
The young flowers are blooming towards the west.

"But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
They are weeping bitterly,  
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,  
In the country of the free."

Little happiness had Clara known since Mr. Lovibond's death, except in Mildred's friendship, the company of the children, to whom she was much attached, and in her religious exercises. The purest and most unalloyed happiness enjoyed by her was in pious meditation, devotion, or attendance at church. Faith, hope, and charity were the blessed three that smoothed her path, and made her invincible in the world's struggle.

A long conversation took place between her and Mildred, which sufficed to raise the spirits of the latter, and make her more reliant upon God's holy providence. The time between then and the hour appointed by John for the meeting on Fish Street Hill passed rapidly, for time is ever rapid in its flight; but to Mildred the few short hours seemed an eternity.

She packed up the few things belonging to herself and the children—"few" is an excellent word, for the wardrobe of mother and children was scanty enough—and, having done that, all her preparations were made.

All this time, Varney Vaillant continued to hang by a hair between life and death.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MORUMBIDGEE IS STOPPED BY SIGNAL OFF TILBURY  
FORT.

THE sun was shining brightly as John Millington took leave of the kind-hearted friends with whom he had come in contact during his brief residence in the Colonnade. Jack Pothacary, and Frederick Webspin-ner, wished him every success in the land of his adoption—prophesied that he would have a brilliant career—said they were sorry to part with him; and, ten minutes afterwards, while engrossed by their occupation, had, with an egotism peculiar to the nineteenth century men, forgotten the fact of his existence.

Not so Thirza.

She loved John with the affectionate love of a fond sister, and she did not like to submit to a separation that might be lifelong. Yet, how was she to help it? What command had she over his movements? or what right had she to have any command over them?

When she reflected that it was for his good that he was about to undertake a journey to the other end of the world, she was satisfied, and refused to any longer harden her heart against his going.

He did not thank her as sincerely as he might have done. His mind was filled with various hopes, doubts, and conjectures. "Thank you very much, my dear, good girl," he said. "I hope, some day, to have an

opportunity of showing you how much I appreciate the services you have rendered me by giving you a substantial proof of my gratitude."

"Oh, I am much obliged; but I don't want that?" she replied, coldly and distantly.

It nearly broke her heart to be either one or the other; but pride would have its way.

"That is all very well, my little lover of flowers," said John. "I know you are disinterested and generous, and I also know that people in your position cannot afford to waste time or money."

Oh, how these thoughtless words cut her to the heart! "People in her position!" And what was her position, after all? She worked honestly for her living. She was respectable, and her heart was uncontaminated with the wickedness of the world. It was hard to be talked to like this by the man whom she had done so much to serve.

"Good-bye!" she said, regarding him reproachfully.

They shook hands. He snatched up a bundle of flowers, and walked rapidly away in the direction of the City. He got into the first cab, because he was ashamed to show himself—or, perhaps, fear, craven fear, had something to do with his reluctance to face the popular gaze.

How his imprisoned heart fluttered and beat against his breast! He was going to meet his wife—that wife who had so much cause to abhor him, and who, notwithstanding, loved him as much, ay, or more, than she did when he led her to the altar.

Who can truthfully interpret the mysterious workings of a woman's heart ?

His agitation was not altogether caused by the anticipated interview with his wife. It seemed to him that some catastrophe might happen ere the ship was fairly on her way across the high seas. What the nature of this accident would be he could not pretend to determine ; but he was haunted with a vague apprehension which set him ill at ease.

Standing with anxious and expectant face at the base of the column which commemorates the great and disastrous fire which laid half London in ashes, was Mildred with her two children.

When they saw their father through the cab-window, they uttered a short cry, for they recognised him. Breaking from their mother, they ran away, and were soon caught in his arms.

Mildred waited until her husband had kissed and spoken to his children, then she considered that her turn had arrived. Sweet, indeed, were the kisses he rained upon her face. It was a happy moment ; and they augured a happy future from it.

When all were in the cab, the vehicle moved as rapidly as it could down Thames Street, and husband and wife conversed in an animated manner until the Dock was reached.

The *Morumbidgee* was a vessel of two thousand tons burden, fitted with powerful engines, and well adapted for a passenger traffic. When John arrived, he found that most of those who had engaged berths had taken



possession of them ; and soon after he was on board, the ship floated out of the Dock, and sailed majestically down the river.

John sat abaft the funnel ; and having chosen a retired corner, put his arm round his wife's waist, and looking lovingly in her face, said, " Milly, darling !"

" Yes, my own !" she replied, returning his glance with equal fondness.

" Now we are safe ! We are on our way to a foreign land, where I can retrieve my character, and even my reputation. You know the old saying ?"

" What old saying, dear ?"

" ' Better late than never. ' "

" That has always found an echo in my heart," said Mildred. " Oh, yes ! it is ever better late than never."

" I look back with shame, horror, disgust—I cannot find a word sufficiently expressive—upon my past career ; but, on the other hand, I look forward with pride to my future."

" It will be what you make it, John," said Mildred, whose eyes joy had filled with tears.

" I know that ; I am perfectly satisfied that all rests with myself ; and I am firmly determined never to touch anything spirituous again. Our first parents drank water, and I can do the same."

" Drink in moderation."

" No, I cannot do that ; perhaps my weakness is hereditary ; but, if I do indulge, I must do so to excess."

"Have you really made up your mind to do this?" she asked.

"Yes, for your sake. You shall no longer have cause to blush for me."

"Will you do this for me, dear John?"

"Once more, yes. I have to make atonement for my atrocious conduct, my——"

"No, no, don't upbraid yourself. It is all over ; let it be forgotten !" she said, interrupting him.

"I cannot forget," he replied, a dark cloud crossing his face. "Not yet, at least, when I think of that poor man lying in the hospital. And, yet, he deserved his fate, if ever a man did deserve to be hurried from one world to another. Hullo ! what is this ?" he said, suddenly ; "are not the engines slackening their speed ?"

"It would seem so."

"Do you feel it?"

"I feel a perceptible decrease in the motion of the vessel."

"Wait here with the children, while I go and ascertain the cause."

As he spoke, John rose and went forward where the captain was. The captain happened to be in a bad temper. He never stopped at Tilbury, except by signal ; and thinking that all his passengers were on board, he was annoyed at being brought up at a moment's notice at the Fort.

"Why are we stopping, captain ?" inquired John.

"You know as much about that as I do," was the reply.

"Is it not usual to stop here?"

"Not with me."

"What place is that over there?"

"Gravesend, on the right; Tilbury, on the left."

"Thank you. Then you don't know why the ship is signalled?"

"To take up passengers who ought to have been aboard two hours ago, I suppose," was the only answer the captain felt himself under an obligation to give.

It is a subject of frequent remark, that sailors are frequently uncivil and disagreeable at the commencement of a voyage; but those who make the complaint, should make allowances for the severing of ties, the heart-breaking partings, and the numerous sacrifices that a man who weds himself to the sea has to submit to.

As soon as the *Morumbidgee* came to a standstill, a boat put off from Tilbury, and headed against the tide in the direction of the Australian clipper.

A little time was lost before the boat left the steamer; and when it did, the identical old man who had made himself so amiable to Thirza during the illuminations sprang up the ladder, and stepped on board.

Seeking out the captain, he said, with a profound bow, "Will you, inform me whether you have on board a passenger by the name of Millington?"

"John?" said the captain.

"Yes."

"Wife, and two children?"

"That's him," replied the old man.

"Well, if you want him, he's on board; only I should like to know by what authority you stop my vessel by signal, when you might have done your business just as well on shore?"

"Not at all. I wish to make sure of my bird. When the twig is well limed, the feathered songster can't escape. This is my authority."

He exhibited a document to the captain, who glanced over it, and said, "It isn't the first time this sort of thing has happened on board my boat. You shall have all the assistance I can give you. There he stands. Go to him, and take him away with you."

The old man went to John, and showing him the paper the captain had just read, said, "I arrest you, John Millington, for the attempted murder of Varney Vaillant."

At the same moment, a police-officer, who had come in the boat with the old man, placed himself on the other side of John, and allowed a pair of handcuffs to glisten in the sunlight.

To suddenly check the flood of joy streaming through the bounding heart is frequently to paralyze the brain, or bring about a collapse of the mental powers.

Those who saw John Millington when the officers took him formally into custody, and placed the hand-

cuffs round his wrists, were terrified at the expression of frenzied amazement which spread over his face.

If ever a man looked maniacal, he did. It was fortunate that they had taken the precaution to render him, harmless, for as a thunderstorm breaks from long-gathering, murky clouds, and dashes itself over the earth in a torrent of devastating fury, so did John at last give way to the mad rage which possessed him.

His struggles were frantic, and almost super-human. He threw himself on the deck, and behaved more like a savage than a rational being.

When subdued by the violence of his efforts, he was led along as easily as a lamb, and bundled into the little boat alongside, as if he had been a bale of goods.

All this time Mildred had been petrified. The passengers stood aloof, and howled disdainfully at her when it was whispered that John was arrested on a capital charge. They were amazed to think that their nobility should have been contaminated by association with an assassin and his "belongings," as they designated his wife and children.

The latter discovered that something untoward had happened, and they raised their voices in a shrill treble, and cried very discordantly in concert.

White as a block of alabaster, Mildred, pressing her hand to her side, to stay the fierce pulsations of her heart, rushed after her husband ; and, catching

hold of the policeman by the arm, exclaimed, "What are you going to do with him? Tell me; I am his wife!"

"Are you?" said the man, turning round with a pitying look. "Then I am sorry for you!"

"I do not want your pity," she replied; "but if my husband is going in that boat, I demand to be taken with him? You must not—cannot—dare not, separate us!"

He looked on the deck thoughtfully, as if expecting to see a solution of the problem there. The tide was rushing down with great velocity, and the noise of the wavelets, leaping up against the sides of the ship, was distinctly audible. A thick column of black smoke issued from the funnels; and the engines revolved slowly occasionally, to prevent the steamer gliding down below Gravesend.

"If you have a spark of compassion and generosity," pleaded Mildred, in passionate, soul-stirring accents, "you will not refuse to put my children and me on shore! I cannot go to a foreign land alone! I must stay with my husband; it is my duty! Do not deny me the poor consolation of following his fortunes, whatever they may be, to the last!"

"Yes, yes, let her go with him!" chorused the passengers.

Seeing that the tide of popular favour was going in Mildred's favour, and discovering no supreme reason **why** he should refuse compliance with her request, the

officer said, "Come along! Give me the children, and I'll hand them into the boat."

John and Milly, still crying vociferously, were placed in the boat, and Mildred followed.

"Is there any baggage?" asked the officer.

"I suppose so; but it's all in the hold," replied the captain, surlily. "You have detained me long enough already! I must go on my voyage! They can make an application for compensation to the owners, who would rather pay demurrage than that I should be behind my time, for I am bound, under a heavy penalty to reach Adelaide in so many days!"

"Oh, never mind the baggage! They may have that!" cried Mildred.

So this question was set at rest.

Mildred placed the children on one of the thwarts, and kneeling down upon the boards at the bottom of the boat upon which John was lying, supported his head in her lap, and endeavoured to comfort him.

The side of the ship was thronged with crew and passengers, to take a parting look at the little boat and its melancholy cargo. They saw a sight that was not erased from their memories for many a long year. Mildred's bonnet had fallen off, and her long, glossy, silken hair streamed over her shoulders in a radiant mass. John's face was stony and impassive. The hot, scalding tears that fell upon his flesh, from Mildred's weeping eyes, did not rouse him—his manacled hands lay upon his breast. The children having a sense of

novelty born within them, stopped their crying, and looked up at the passengers, as if they expected them to toss cakes or oranges into the boat below.

"Ahoy!" cried a rough voice on deck.

"Ay, ay!" responded one of the rowers in the boat.

"Are you all ready?"

There was a response in the affirmative; a rope was cast over the side, the smoke shot up in denser clouds, the rattle of the machinery, as it quickly revolved, was audible, as the Morumbidgee darted along with the swiftly rushing tide, as if it were a thing of life and the white sails were its wings.

In a very short space of time she was out of sight, and the little boat toiled slowly back to Tilbury. Of all melancholy places, Tilbury is, perhaps, the most profoundly dreary.

Those whose lot it has been to bid a long farewell to a dear friend who has gone on board an outward-bound vessel at Tilbury, will admit that the return to the ill-built shed, called by courtesy a railway-station, was the most wretched of their lives.

Tilbury, and its surrounding scenery of marshy land and muddy shore; its badly-constructed, useless forts, only valuable to antiquaries, on account of its historical associations, is the incarnation of desolation. A convict wearing out his life on that sterile tract called Dry Tortugas, if transported to Tilbury would scarcely feel thankful for the change.

Mildred was so wrapped up in her husband that she



had no time or inclination to criticise Tilbury. Fortunately, a train was ready to start for London, and the party took possession of a third-class carriage, which they retained to themselves during the journey.

John's head fell upon his breast, and he did not utter a word to his wife or his captors. Mildred was alarmed at this lethargy. She accosted him repeatedly, and once succeeded in arousing his attention, when he stared vacantly at her, and, bursting into an idiotic laugh, cried, "Red, red ; all red ! Flowers red, faces red ! The very water we wash in is red ! Ha, ha ! and I made it red ! that's more than the Egyptian magicians could do ! Red, red ; all red !"

After this paroxysm he became more silent than before.

"Oh ! this is awful !" sobbed Mildred ; "his reason has forsaken him !"

When the terminus was reached a cab was procured, and all were driven to the prison. On the way, Mildred said to the astute old man with the twinkling grey eyes, "Will you tell me how you came to find out that my husband was on board the *Morumbidgee*—out of curiosity I should like to know ?"

"I don't mind telling you. It's no secret," said the man. "I'm known in the force as Old Hundreds, and I have acquired a reputation for being able to ferret a sly fox out of his burrow as well, or better, than anybody. Scotland Yard has been very anxious to make Mr. Millington's acquaintance for some time past. The

job was given to me amongst others. There may have been a dozen after him, but they could find no clue. One day I saw a flower-girl——”

“Ha!” cried Mildred, “I fancied she was his betrayer. Oh, that the false-hearted thing were here, that I——”

“Hush,” said Old Hundreds, “don’t jump to conclusions in such a hurry; although this girl was the cause of your husband’s arrest, she was the innocent cause of it.”

“How can that be?” said Mildred.

She had forgotten all about the fatal letter.

“Wait a bit, and you shall hear,” replied Old Hundreds. “Though I watched this girl to your house often and often, she was so clever that I could not find out where she lived. On the night of the illuminations I caught sight of her in Piccadilly, and followed her. Seeing she had a letter in her hand, I contrived to get possession of it.”

“Oh, oh!” said Mildred; “now it is all plain to me. That letter contained full instructions to me how to act. It supplied you with the name of the ship, the hour of starting, and everything else.”

“It did.”

“Why did you not arrest John at the foot of the monument?”

“I had my reasons.”

“Or, again in the Dock?”

“I repeat, I had my reasons.”

“And they were——”

"These," said Old Hundreds. "Criminals are often slippery fish. On shore they may be prepared for anything. Accomplices may be at hand; but taken off their guard, as your husband was, they can do little or nothing. Besides, they cannot escape, unless they commit suicide by jumping into the river. In the second place, the affair will supply a telling paragraph for the newspapers—'Romantic Capture;' 'Affecting Scene;' 'Clever Officer;' and 'Old Hundreds Again;' and so on, do you see? Well, anything that tends to increase my popularity, tends also to obtain for me an increase of pay. I do not like to hide my light under a bushel, and though I work like a mole in the dark, I like the fruit of my labours to be paraded in the sunshine."

It was a relief to Mildred to know that Thirza had not betrayed John. If she had been satisfied that she had done so, every atom of faith in human nature would have been destroyed.

"Can I enter the prison with him?" asked Mildred, as the cab stopped before a gloomy-looking pile.

"You cannot," replied Old Hundreds; "this is Newgate. The friends of prisoners are admitted at certain hours and under special rules and regulations. Here you must part."

Stifling a sigh, Mildred endeavoured to rouse John; but all her efforts were fruitless. He did not seem to be conscious of anything.

"Alas—alas!" she cried, wringing her hands; "this is worse than all!"

"What are you talking of?" said Old Hundreds.

"His reason is shattered by the shock."

"And you call that bad?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, for my part, I should call it a piece of luck."

"You would!" she cried, in astonishment. "Pray explain?"

"They never execute a man when he's mad," exclaimed Old Hundreds, significantly.

Frightful as was the prospect of John's wandering through life a maniac, yet the possibility that such a fate might save him from something infinitely worse, conveyed a ray of comfort and a gleam of sunshine to Mildred's half-broken heart.

She had involuntarily conjured up visions of the oncoming future.

One of these visions had for its subject the repulsive scaffold draped with black cloth, the executioner, the wildly-yelling mob, the doomed culprit; but now this changed like a dissolving view, and gave place to the madhouse, the dungeon, the chain, the mindless creature in the semblance of a man.

They were both horrible, but the latter somewhat less so than the former.

Without saying a syllable to his wife or children, John suffered himself to be dragged rather than led through the portals of the gaol, which closed upon him, and he disappeared from sight.

Old Hundreds wished the sorrowing wife, "Good

night !” advising her to come again in the morning, and entered the prison by the debtors’ door.

So Mildred found herself late in the afternoon without a home, without a friend, and without a halfpenny, in the streets of London.

To go to High Park Terrace would, she knew, be useless, because Clara had declared her intention of going away early in the day, and she had no clue to her new address.

There was no alternative for her but to wander about the streets until the attention of the police was called to her forlorn condition, and she was provided with a night’s lodging and a crust of bread in the morning at the casual ward of the nearest workhouse.

What a state for a lady—the wife of a gentleman—to be reduced to ! Truly, the reverses that it is possible for people to meet with in this world are endless. The millionaire to-day may be a beggar to-morrow. Comfort may be changed into misery in a few short years, as Mildred knew to her cost.

And yet she was not to blame for what had happened. The wretched man, mewed up in his solitary cell, within yonder frowning prison, was the sole cause of all the evil.

Regarding the gaol with a wistful look, Mildred stood in the Old Bailey until nightfall ; when, to add to her misery, a drizzling rain began to descend.

Putting her children in the shadow of a doorstep, she placed herself before them to keep them as dry as she could, and steeled her heart as she heard them

cry themselves piteously to sleep, for they were hungry, and their mother had not bread to give them.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### LEONARD RETURNS TO ENGLAND—THE MEETING BEFORE NEWGATE.

WE must now return to Leonard, who, having settled all his affairs, arranged for a passage to England by the next steamer.

He wondered why he had not heard from Clara, or the Millingtons ; but forbore to write himself, wishing to take them by surprise.

A quick voyage and fine weather soon carried him within view of those white cliffs which have brought tears to the eyes of many a stout-hearted man, long exiled from his native land, but compelled to return at last by the magnetic attraction of home.

Having landed in London, he went to the offices of the firm with which he was connected, and made his report ; was congratulated upon his return, and hailed joyfully by all who knew him.

When business was over, he bethought himself of pleasure, and walked a little distance in order to see one or two friends who would, he knew, be glad to hear of his return. Then it was growing late. Without waiting to have any dinner, he jumped into a cab, and

drove to High Park Terrace, musing the while upon his altered circumstances.

As a partner in the firm of Barton, Brett, and Tomlins, he was entitled to a considerable share in the profits of the business, and could well afford to make his much-loved Clara his wife.

The result of steady application was well exemplified in his person. Good conduct had been allied to, and assisted by, a certain amount of good-fortune, which is, in many instances, indispensable to success.

The cab stopped with a jerk at the door of the old and well-known house.

Leonard stepped lightly out, paid the cabman so liberally as to extort "Thank you!" from a member of a generally thankless body.

He knocks at the door, and the sound reverberates hollowly through the empty corridor.

"What is this?" he cries. "No light in the hall--the shutters up in the windows!"

Rat, tat, tat! he knocks again, louder than before. A slight noise is heard in the area. It is the servant taking a look at the visitor. No; it is but the scampering of rats.

"Bless my soul!" he says, turning pale, "the house is empty! Can they have gone away? If so, I should have been informed of the fact. I must make inquiries at the tradesman's over the way."

Across the road he goes, and speaks to the aproned man behind a counter. He is busy serving a customer with some tea; for he is a grocer, and will not answer

any questions until the important operation is concluded.

"Now, sir, what for you?" he says, expecting an order.

"Can you inform me what has become of a family named Millington, who used to live over the way?"

"I know who you mean," replied the man. "They were what we call a bad lot. They have gone away."

"Indeed!"

"Yes! Gone, too, in everybody's debt; the landlord could not get the rent, so he sold them up!"

"The inhuman wretch!" ejaculated Leonard.

"Not at all, sir," said the grocer; "people ought to pay their way. We all have to live; and as you seem to take such an interest in them—being a relation, perhaps—I should imagine you would have no objection to satisfy my claim upon them of two fifteen for goods, sold and delivered."

"Oh, yes; I will pay you, with pleasure!" replied Leonard. "Make out a receipt; but go on with your story, and tell me if you know where they are now."

"That is more than I do, sir. Will you step into my parlour—as I believe the spider in the song remarked to the fly, also in the song," said the tradesman, in high good humour. "Thomas!" to a consumptive-looking boy, "mind the shop."

"Certainly, sir!" replied the boy, making a grimace, behind his master's back, and beginning to cram the



sugar out of a tub into his mouth by handfuls, in a reckless way that was shocking to behold.

"Now, sir!" exclaimed the grocer. "This way, if you please. Two fifteen I think I said? Are you satisfied, or shall I, as a test of accuracy, refer to the ledger?"

"Oh, no; your word is sufficient."

"Very well. I have a stamp,"—he affixed one to a bill he rapidly made out. "You perceive, I write my name across it—thus. I think you will find that correct, sir."

Leonard took out his purse, paid the grocer two pounds fifteen shillings, and said, "Now, I will thank you to give me what information you may have it in your power to supply respecting the Millingtons; as you lived opposite them, you must have had opportunities of observing things that would have escaped others."

"Quite correct, sir. I am sure, when the poor things were sold up, and there was scarcely a stick of furniture in the house, I frequently let them have a pound of dips, out of charity, as I thought, and supplied them with tea and sugar many and many times, never expecting to see my money."

"What?" cried Leonard, "did it come to that?"

"Ah! that it did, sir, and worse. You see, Mr. Millington used to drink. There was an affair with the police, which first of all ruined his credit; he got placed in the House of Correction for a week, but he brought his family into a frightful state of destitution at last!"

"And I never had the slightest inkling of it!" moaned Leonard, sinking into a chair, and covering his face with his hands.

The worthy grocer could give him no further information, and, with a reeling brain, he staggered into the street.

It was excruciating to think that his brother John and Mildred, Clara, the children, should have been reduced to such straits, when he could, by signing his name to a cheque, have obviated it all.

He made inquiries all over the neighbourhood, but he could receive little information. At one place of inquiry he was told that Mr. Millington had been gone some time. Mrs. Millington, with the two children, left that morning, and that Clara—or the other young lady, as she was called—had taken her departure an hour later.

"So the family is broken up!" muttered Leonard. "How very, very sad; well, I can do no more to-night. I will advertise, and renew my exertions to-morrow."

As he turned to go, he saw against the wall of a newspaper-shop one of those placarded boards which give an epitome of the news contained in the evening journals.

He glanced his eyes over it, and started as if he had been shot, for he saw in large letters, staring him in the face, "Discovery of the Tragedy. Capture of the Attempted Assassin, this day. Full particulars respecting John Millington, the Culprit."

Could it be true! Might there not be more than one Millington, and one John Millington? Leonard felt overwhelmed with shame and fear. He went into an adjacent public-house and called for some brandy, which he drank raw, as it was poured out of the bottle.

He felt his strength revived as he imbibed the potent spirit, and was more capable of calm and deliberate thought. Two men were talking close to him. One said, "I know the fellow well enough, he used to deal with me. He was an architect, or something of that sort. Pretty wife he had."

"Ah! that she was, and as good a creature as ever drew breath."

"So I've heard say."

"There is a long rigmarole about it in the papers," resumed the first man; "and from what I can make of it, there's a Frenchman in it."

Leonard breathed heavily.

"You see, the Frenchman made love to his wife, or something, and the husband, Millington——"

Leonard called for more brandy.

"Knocked him down with a stick, and pretty nigh killed him. They do say that he's injured for life, but likely to get over the worst of it. The oddest part of the whole affair is that Millington should have been taken on board the Australian emigrant ship, this very morning, off Tilbury Fort."

"That's odd," said the other. "But it was to be, of course."

"Yes. I suppose it won't be a hanging matter if the Frenchman don't die."

"No ; but he'll go away for life."

Leonard waited to hear no more ; he was convinced now that his brother had supplied London with the last sensation, and he spared himself the pain of buying and reading a paper. He had heard that those accused, but unconvicted, of crimes and offences were always lodged in Newgate, so he made his way there to see if he could glean any further intelligence respecting his unhappy brother.

As he rode along in the cab he bowed his head in silent anguish.

So true it is that a man who is false to himself and the traditions of his youth, not only involves himself in nameless misery, but hurls a thousand horrors upon the heads of those with whom he unfortunately happens to be connected by an accident of birth.

Very cold and cheerless was the dark, dark night. Pitilessly beat the rain upon the pavement ; hard was the lot of the houseless wanderer who was compelled to brave the storm and might not find a shelter.

Mildred was wet and miserable. As she stood shivering in the inclement weather, she murmured, looking at her children, "Were it not for those dear innocents, I should be strongly tempted to end it."

"It." If the full meaning of that little word could be graphically put on paper, what a volume of wretchedness would it not disclose ! "It," alluded to and comprehended an earthly career. "It," was the unadulter-

rated grief brought upon her by a weak rather than a bad husband.

Her reverie was interrupted by a policeman, who caught sight of Mildred.

"What are you doing there?" he exclaimed, harshly.

"Nothing wrong," she replied, timidly. "I am only sheltering my children from the rain."

"Have you no home?"

"None!"

"Where's your husband?"

Mildred pointed to Newgate.

"In there, is he? Well; I can't have you loitering about here. What's your parish?"

"Fulham," said Mildred.

"Go there, then, and they will give you a night's lodging."

"I can't walk so far; or if I could, the children could not. Pray let them sleep here till morning. I am not a beggar or a bad character—I am not, indeed!"

"I know nothing about that," returned the policeman. "Your husband being in Newgate is not much in your favour. A part of my duty is to move on tramps and vagabonds; you come under that head, and on you must go!"

"All the spirit was now crushed out of poor Mildred.

She could not find a word with which to speak angrily to the policeman.

"Very well," she said, meekly. "I will go; though it wrings my heart to wake the children. They will catch their death of cold going through this rain?" and she added, in a low, musically low, voice, "I know that my Redeemer liveth! He suffered for me! I will not despair! Into thy hands, and thy merciful kindness, O my Saviour! dearly loved from my youth upwards, I commend myself! Pity me! Pity me! Pity me!"

A radiant smile sat for a moment upon her countenance, as her faith enabled her to rise superior to earthly woes and troubles.

"Then it faded away, and she gently roused her fitfully slumbering children, saying, "Wake, my darlings! It is time to go ho——"

She would have said "home;" but a choking sob broke in her throat, and impeded her utterance.

The children awoke drowsily; and, taking little Milly in her arms, she kissed her repeatedly with the wildest demonstration of affection; then she led the way up the muddy street.

The policeman looked after them with commiserating eye; and being moved to compassion by some subtle impulse, exclaimed, "Hi!"

Mildred turned round.

"There's the Field Lane Refuge, if you go up Snow Hill, and turn to the left, down Clerkenwell way," he continued.

"Will they take us in there?" she asked, trembling as if with an incipient attack of ague.

"Oh, yes ; they are bound to do that. You ask the next constable you see on the beat, and he'll direct you."

Mildred inclined her head gratefully.

The policeman pursued his way to look out for more vagrants, and perform his onerous duties in the strict and impartial manner for which he was celebrated amongst his comrades.

Wearily, wearily walked the outcasts.

The cold, relentless wind dashed the equally relentless rain into her unprotected face, and found a pleasure in rolling down the necks of the children, who moaned piteously, for they were too exhausted to cry.

Wearily, wearily Mildred plodded along, till she reached the open space in front of Newgate. Here she halted, to take one more look at the gloomy building in which her husband was confined.

The constable had spoken of a refuge. She almost found it in her heart to beg of the first respectable-looking man she passed.

Just as she was debating the important question in her mind, a gentleman approached. She was mindful of the scriptural phrase, "I cannot dig ; to beg, I am ashamed." But hunger is a cruel task-master. She could not bear to see her children suffer.

Meeting him half way in the fitful gleam of the gas-lamps, she exclaimed, "Pray pardon me ; but my children and I are homeless and hungry ! If you have——"

She stopped, for the gentleman regarded her with such a strange expression, that she was frightened.

"What! Can I believe my eyes? Are—are you Mildred Millington?" exclaimed the man.

For a moment the poor outcast stood as if she had been turned into stone. Then she fell on her knees in all the mud of the roadway, and clasping her hands together, with her eyes raised to the clouded sky, said, pathetically, "I thank Thee! I thank Thee!"

Disregarded was the rain, the cold, and the hunger, and forgotten was all her misery, in that one moment of compensating joy, when Leonard caught her in his arms, and said, with tears running down his cheeks, "My poor dove! has it come to this!"

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## CHAPTER XX.

### AFTER A STORM COMES A CALM.

LEONARD MILLINGTON had arrived opportunely indeed. In a short time Mildred would have undergone the—to her delicate and sensitive nature,—sadly blunted, it must be admitted, by the disastrous and untoward course of events—unspeakable degradation of herding in what was little better than a barn, with the refuse of a large and populous city.

It does not follow that all those who are sunk in the depths of poverty are the scum of the earth. Mis-



fortune brings us in contact with strange bedfellows ; but undeniably the inmates of a refuge are not desirable acquaintances, and as long as a man or a woman has health and strength to use the talents and the two arms with which a bountiful Providence has blessed them, they have no moral right to sink so low.

The fair inference is that they have themselves alone to thank for their miserable position ; and, though deserving of charity, as all outcasts are, to those who have the Cross for the emblem of their faith, yet pity should be dashed with censure.

The collection of concentrated misery of a refuge on a cold, wet night is inconceivable to those unacquainted with such scenes of London life. The jaded, half-starved, shrinking, shivering beings who huddle together round the fire, and munch their hunches of bread like wolves half-famished, may well bring tears to the eyes of the philanthropist, and make the advocates of high-pressure civilization think of the primæval forest, and the simple life of those who inhabit the far-west, the land of the setting sun.

When Leonard called Mildred his "poor dove," his tears fell fast and mingled with her own. For some minutes they were so overcome that they were unable to speak. Leonard was the first to recover his serenity. He said, in a pathetic tone, "Tell me, my dear child, —tell me what has brought all this about. It must be a long story, and one painful to dwell upon. I shall be content with a brief outline."

"It is, indeed, painful," replied Mildred ; "and I

thank heaven with my whole heart for sending you to me in the hour of my tribulation and distress. It is very wicked of me, Leonard ; but I began to doubt the loving merey of our Lord. I thought that my prayers had been wasted on the empty air, and that I was utterly deserted."

"Where is John?" asked Leonard, after a pause.

She pointed to the frowning prison as she had done when the constable spoke to her a short time before.

"I feared so !" he exclaimed. "I presume that the reports in the papers about his having attacked Vailant are perfectly correct."

"Alas, yes ! He had no intention of killing him. We were both the victims of an infamous plot. I cannot tell you all now, for the story is too long, and the poor dear children are wet through. Where can you take us, Leonard ?"

"Let me see. Mr Tomlins, my partner, lives at Bayswater. He will not mind the lateness of the hour. Let us go there in a cab."

"Oh, but look at our wretched condition !" said Mildred, half ashamed.

"Never mind that. You are not to blame. Tomlins is a large-hearted man, and his wife the most amiable creature that ever existed. They have children of their own, and they will feel for and love you and yours. Come ; wherever I go, I am sure that my brother's wife will be more than welcome !"

A cab was soon procured for them by the very con-

stable who just before had been so imperious in his manner, now glad to receive sixpence from Leonard. Such is the way of the world. Who shall deny that money is king?

Mr. and Mrs. Tomlins happened to be sitting up late that night. Engaged actively all the day, Tomlins, nevertheless, frequently worked at home till the small hours, and on these occasions his wife invariably sat up with him, reading a book or amusing herself in some one of those numerous innocent ways of killing time that women are so well acquainted with.

They received Mildred and her children with the greatest kindness, without asking a single question as to how she was reduced to the miserable state in which they saw her. Leonard, of course, informed Mr. Tomlins of the facts as soon as they were alone. There was not much discussion that night. The heavy eyelids were too pleased to welcome the sweet restorer—sleep; but, when the morning came, Mildred and Leonard were early together, and he was made conversant with the lamentable history of the past month.

It was decided that the best available legal talent should be engaged for the defence; and, pending the trial, the most celebrated mad doctors should be called in to speak to the state of his mind.

Though John was culpable in a high degree, his brother did not blame him so much as he at first fancied he should be obliged to. The Frenchman, in the opinion of those who knew all the particulars of the affray, brought his injuries upon himself.

And how was Varney Vaillant all this time? He had been dying. For weeks he had hovered about death's door, waiting for the sable plumes of the spirit's wings to waft him through the portal, but he was not yet to die.

The doctors declared that he would recover; but that he had received injuries which would adhere to him as long as he lived. Instead of being a tall, handsome man of fashion, he would be compelled to hobble along with the aid of a stick, or to be dragged about in a Bath-chair, for that strength—the pride of his youth—had departed from him.

What awful retribution for wrong-doing! He had dugged a pitfall for others, into which Nemesis hurled him headlong.

So it came to pass that John Millington, after a preliminary examination, was committed to take his trial on a charge of attempted murder at the ensuing sessions at the Old Bailey.

So deplorable, however, was his mental condition, that it was evident his brain was shattered by the frightful shock his system had received on board the *Morumbidgee*.

It was too much to be arrested when hope had taken fast hold of his sanguine soul. Had he been captured in London, he could have borne it with some show of equanimity; but when he thought that he had left disgrace, peril, and old humiliating associations behind him for ever, to begin, unfettered, a new career in another country, with his dear wife and

children to applaud his efforts—and this thought turned out to be as transparent and fallacious as moonshine—why his mind gave way, and he broke down utterly.

Mr. Pardon Seagrove, at that time the leader of the Northern Circuit, and a man unrivalled as a clever lawyer, and brilliant advocate at the common law bar, was retained, with Serjeant Parker, and Mr. Nosworthy, for the defence.

It was reputed that the trial would be a very simple affair, and for this reason. A plea of guilty would be put upon the record ; and, after a statement of facts, medical testimony would be adduced to show that the prisoner, if sane at the time of the attack, had now totally lost all possession of his reason.

The object of Mr. Seagrove and his colleagues, would be to obtain the shortest term of imprisonment which the court felt itself justified in pronouncing ; for Leonard, together with Mildred, fondly hoped, that by care and kindness, John might be recalled to his normal condition, and once more be restored to the bosom of his family.

Strict, rigid, and impartial justice called for punishment, but not for a long period of incarceration, during which the hapless man, mentally blind, with reason's-eye obscured, would be wandering in the dark.

The excessive good-nature and brotherly affection of Leonard partially consoled Mildred, and she forbore to murmur at her hard lot. As may be imagined, Leonard's efforts to discover Clara were incessant, but,

strange to say, he could not succeed in doing so ; and the way in which he did, at last, find out her whereabouts, was singular in the extreme.

He had been out with Mildred making inquiries in the neighbourhood of Fulham. His air was dejected and spiritless. He feared that the darling of his heart—the only woman he ever did, or ever could love—was enduring want, and was probably, at that moment, in a state of extreme destitution.

The money lying at his banker's, and the sovereigns he usually carried in his pocket, seemed to mock him. They could do so much, and yet so little. All-potent gold was, in this instance, powerless.

"I am very much afraid that Clara has gone away from town," said Mildred.

"How can that be, when you tell me she had no money to travel with?" he replied.

"Ah, that is true ! I had forgotten. If in town, surely we ought to find her."

"It's like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay," said Leonard. "Not one of my advertisements have received an answer ; the private inquiry offices are at fault ; and the police, with a handsome reward staring them in the face, are unable to make much progress."

"A search such as we are conducting is a thing that requires time. You must not abandon hope, simply because your first efforts have not been crowned with success. Hope on—hope ever—is a brave maxim. Poor dear Clara ! what would I not give, at this moment, to fold her in my arms?"

They walked on a little further; a small shop arrested Mildred's glance. She stopped, and looked at some little Berlin wool patterns, exposed for sale in the window. Some were for kettle-holders, others for slippers and footstools. There were foxes' heads, and cats' heads, and dogs, birds—singular devices, and curiously-wrought emblems, much prized and admired by industrious ladies.

"Come along!" said Leonard, a little impatiently. "It is getting late."

His numerous disappointments had soured his temper.

"Wait one moment!" exclaimed Mildred, steadfastly regarding a rough-haired dog, sitting upon a cushion.

"What are you looking at?"

"That kettle-holder. Do you see the rough terrier?"

"Yes."

"Well, if that has not Clara's ears and big paws, I——"

"Clara's what?" cried Leonard, in astonishment, not in the remotest degree understanding the allusion to Clara's ears and big paws.

"Paws and ears!" repeated Mildred, abstractedly.

"What in the world are you talking about?" he asked. "Those are dog's ears, and Clara's hands are white and tiny. Upon my word, I——"

Mildred did not wait to hear him out. Exclaiming, "Wait here!" she entered the shop, and addressing

herself to the proprietress, who stood behind the counter, said, "Were not those kettle-holders in the window worked by a young lady?"

"They were worked by a young person whom we employ," answered the woman, who was pompous and consequential, like many of her class.

"Do you know—that is, can you favour me with her address?" asked Mildred, anxiously.

"We are not in the habit of giving addresses. If you fancy her style of work, and give her an order through us, we will take care that it is carefully executed."

"No, no—that is not what I want. I do not care about her work, it is herself I wish to see."

"For what reason? You must excuse me for asking," said the shopwoman; "because I have known ladies find out where milliners, dressmakers, Berlin-wool workers, and the like, reside, and employ them independently, so that the shopkeepers lose their custom and their fair profit."

"Oh, I perceive your reason now," replied Mildred; "and I cannot blame you for being reticent. In order to restore your confidence, I will be candid with you. If, as I suppose, the young lady who worked your patterns is the same one of whom I am in search, she is a dear friend and relation of mine, whose address I have been seeking vainly for days and days. You will confer a great favour upon me by directing me to her, and, so far from losing my custom, I will make you a sacred promise to deal with you, and you alone, whenever, and as long as I am in London."



The woman smiled in spite of herself, and said, "Perhaps you will give me an earnest of your goodwill. I never like to neglect a chance, and to put a person to the test inspires either confidence or distrust."

Mildred nervously put her hand in her pocket, drew out her portmonnaie, and took from it a couple of sovereigns, which she threw upon the counter, saying, "Put me up goods to that amount, and send them to this address."

She gave her card, with Mr. and Mrs. Tomlins' direction written upon it.

"Thank you, ma'am!" replied the woman. "Now I shall be glad to serve you."

With a pencil, she wrote "Miss Lovibond, 1, Western Grove Villas, North End, Fulham,"

Mildred snatched it out of her hand, ran from the shop, brandished it in Leonard's face, and, wild with joy and excitement, exclaimed, "I have found her—I have found her!"

"How — when — where?" inquired Leonard, who fancied that she was taking leave of her senses.

She gave him the piece of paper she had received from the shopkeeper, upon which the much-wished-for address was written, and he began to comprehend what had been so misty and inexplicable.

Not knowing the neighbourhood, and being too impatient to ask his way from street to street, he hailed a passing cab, and trusted to the intelligence of the driver, who soon set them down at the door of No. 1

Western Grove Villas, a row of small but picturesque houses, which were evidently cheap and respectable.

"Will you go first?" said Leonard, after paying the cabman. "My sudden appearance might alarm her. Break it gently to her."

"Yes, that will be best," answered Mildred, whose heart fluttered wildly, as did Leonard's.

He waited in the shadow of the porch while Mildred was admitted. He fancied he heard hurried exclamations and loud sobs; and, unable to restrain himself any longer, he rang the bell, pushed by the servant, and, guided by familiar voices, entered a small but neatly-furnished sitting-room.

Two forms stood duskily in the dim twilight. Advancing to one, he caught it in his outstretched arms, holding it to his manly heart in a firm embrace.

I warrant there was kissing there, and fond squeezing of the hand, and such joy was felt as is seldom experienced more than once in a life-time. It was a grand moment.

"Sweet is pleasure after pain."

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE TRIAL.

VARNÉY VAILLANT recovered sufficiently to be able to appear in court. The interest in the trial was not very great amongst the public, and the hall of justice was

by no means densely thronged. No improvement whatever had taken place in John's mental condition, and, when brought up by two officers, and placed between them in the dock, his lack-lustre eyes, and vacant stare, convinced those who saw him that he was an object of compassion rather than a wicked savage, upon whom to pour out a vial of wrath.

Leonard appeared in court with his attorney, but Mildred and Clara stayed away. To look upon John, in his then condition, was intensely painful ; and the details of the trial could only aggravate their misery.

The first act of Leonard, after finding Clara, was to lay the foundation of a new home. So disagreeable were the associations with which Fulham was surrounded, that he flew to a totally different neighbourhood—trying, "over the water," and pitching his tent in the neighbourhood of Brixton.

Here, a pretty villa, elegantly furnished, afforded a new, and comparatively happy, home to Mildred and her children, upon whom she centred all her love and affection.

It was a fixed belief with her that she was deprived for ever of her husband's society. Not that she imagined he would be imprisoned for life, but she dared not hope that his reason would ever come back to him. Her children were now doubly dear to her. Without them, she would have drooped and died.

The marriage between Clara and Leonard was postponed for some months, out of respect to Mildred's grief, and John's fearful position.

Let us draw a pen-and-ink sketch of the party at Brixton on the morning of the trial. The morning-room, as it was called, in contradistinction to the dining, or evening-room, looked out upon the road, which on each side, was lined with elegant villas, of what may be called the Anglican school—a hybrid style—a mixture of half-a-dozen schools, but leaning somewhat to the renaissance.

The furniture was new, and polished by an exemplary servant to a painful state of brightness. Flowers might be seen on stands, and in the windows. The light of the sun was mellowed by passing through Venetian blinds. At a side-table, near the piano, sat Milly and Master John, with Clara between them. If the cabalistic characters displayed upon a slate may be taken as an indication of what was going on, they were apparently being initiated into the mystery of pot-hooks and hangers.

Leonard was glancing over the pages of the leading journal, and Mildred was regarding the pattern of the Brussels carpet with an intentness, showing that her mind was not with the inmates of the room.

“A quarter past nine,” Leonard exclaimed suddenly. “I must be off.”

Mildred, aroused from her abstraction, looked up.

“Is it time for you to go?” she asked.

“Yes; I would rather not be late.”

“What do you think will happen to poor John?” she said.

“I can venture an opinion, but I will not answer

for its soundness," replied Leonard. "I incline to the idea that the court will deal mercifully with the case, and content itself with sentencing him to a short term of imprisonment."

"After which——"

"He will be given up to his friends."

"Oh, that I had him here, now!" cried Mildred, passionately. "I would nurse him with such solicitude, that if anything would restore his sanity, my unceasing kindness should do it!"

"Well, I have no doubt that the opportunity of trying the experiment will some day be given you," said Leonard, who went into the hall for his hat and stick. When he came back, he added, "I shall not go to the office to-day, so you may expect me back as soon as the proceedings are over."

"Good-bye, Leonard, and heaven bless you!" exclaimed Mildred.

He shook her by the hand, nodded to Clara, blowing a kiss over to her, she thanking him with a sweet smile, and went away. As soon as the front-door banged behind him, Mildred sank back in the arm-chair, and her thoughts once more flew away, her features again relapsing into vacancy.

In spirit, she was in a court, on the Crown side, at the Old Bailey. She pictured in her mind's eye the stolid-looking judge, the busy counsel, the morbid spectators, and, lastly, John—her dearly-beloved husband—also, a ghastly, death-like form,

which had once been the gay, sprightly, and volatile Varney Vaillant.

Slowly the hours passed until Leonard's return ; and though Clara frequently addressed herself to her, Mildred did not reply. Seeing this, Clara, with a delicacy and tact which was part and parcel of her nature, took the children out for a long walk, leaving Mildred to nurse her grief, and uninterruptedly brood over her lot, in the vivid present and the shadowy future.

When Leonard reached the court, he found the business of the day just commencing, and took a seat by the side of his solicitor.

Mr. Pardon Seagrove was making notes, preparatory to opening the case ; the medical and other witnesses were waiting to be called ; in the dock stood John, in a state of what was called idiocy, or, as one doctor called it, "a state of complete mental obscuration, which might or might not be permanent."

"Where is Miss Lovibond?" inquired the solicitor, when he saw Leonard. "We cannot get on without her."

"Indeed!" said Leonard, much surprised.

"Did you not get the subpoena I sent you?"

"I have seen nothing of it ; but I will go and bring Miss Lovibond, if you think her evidence important."

"Pray do so ; it is most material."

Leonard at once started away in a cab for that purpose. As he left the court, he met Varney Vaillant, led in, supported by two attendants. He was very weak, ill, and frightfully emaciated. His sunken eyes

and hollow cheeks too plainly told the tale of his sufferings. He recognised Leonard in an instant. His eyes sparkled, and a smile lighted up his ordinarily intelligent countenance. Stretching out his hand, he said, in a voice so altered from the one Leonard was accustomed to hear that he did not know it again, "I am glad to see you. Will you shake hands?"

Leonard's right arm hung rigidly by his side; a stern expression breathed from his face, and he replied, "I would rather decline doing so; for were I to grasp your hand, the pressure would be simply hypocritical. I look upon you as the cause of the ruin of my brother and his wife. Whether the view I take of matters is just or not, your conscience will best inform you."

"Look at me!" cried Varney Vaillant, shudderingly. "Have I nothing to complain of—is my present condition nothing? Look at me, I say, and tell me whether I am altered, or whether I am still the same man you knew before you went to Portugal! If *I* bear no malice in my heart, surely *you* should be equally generous! To despise my poor offer of friendship, is to arrogate to yourself too much infallibility, Mr. Millington."

"I cannot forget what is, and what might have been!" returned, Leonard, stiffly.

"Nor can I!" said Vaillant, with a significant smile, full of meaning.

Leonard bowed, and passed on; the Frenchman muttered something which was unintelligible to those around him, and was conducted to the seat assigned to him.

When the ease was gone into, and all its romantic details fully elaborated and laid before the court, from the note written in Pall Mall, and delivered at High Park Terrace by M. Saint-Roche, to the capture by Old Hundreds on board the Morumbidgee, much sympathy was expressed for John, and the verdict of the public was as against Varney Vaillant, "Serve him right !"

But justice is inexorable ; and, at half-past five, the jury having brought in a verdict of "Guilty of an aggravated assault, with intent to do one Varney Vaillant grievous bodily harm," ignoring the more serious count in the indictment—to wit, an attempt to murder and feloniously slay—against John Millington, with a strong recommendation to mercy, the judge proceeded to pass sentence upon the prisoner.

Amid a breathless silence the judge's words were distinctly audible. His summing-up had been very impartial and recondite. The sentence he pronounced was concise, and more element than had been generally expected.

He alluded to the medical testimony, which placed John's insanity beyond a doubt, and he mentioned the fact that several scientific opinions had been given, encouraging the belief that in the course of time he would recover ; that, however, had nothing to do with the sentence he was about to pass, which, taking the recommendation of the highly intelligent jury, who had tried the case, into consideration, would be five years' imprisonment. He added that the prisoner would at once be placed under competent medical men, and that



should he be restored to sanity before the expiration of the sentence, he would be transferred from a Government Asylum to a penitentiary, there to work out the remainder as decreed by law. Should it please Heaven to afflict him during the entire term, he would afterwards be delivered to his friends, for them to deal with as they thought fit.

This judicial declaration was considered equitable enough; and John was taken away, to be conveyed to the Asylum for Insane Criminals, which is pleasantly situated some distance in the country.

Leonard returned home with Clara, and found Mildred, with resignation stamped upon her face, awaiting their arrival. She mutely interrogated them with her eloquent eyes, and Leonard exclaimed, "John, found guilty of a criminal offence, is to be detained for five years in the Government Asylum for Lunatics. His was a very peculiar case, and, as far as I know, without a precedent. You see, he was not mad at the time the offence was committed, but he became so afterwards. We all think that the judge acted discreetly, and a sad affair is brought to the most satisfactory conclusion that could be expected."

"Thank heaven, it is over!" replied Mildred.

"I can most sincerely say 'Amen' to that!" rejoined Leonard; "for, now that it is over, I may admit that I have suffered an immensity of worry and harassment, though I concealed it as well as I was able."

"What do you gather from the medical testimony?" exclaimed Clara.

"This ; there is reasonable hope and expectation that he will in course of time recover ; but it is impossible to say when. His insanity is in a great measure a blessing ; for while it endures, he will not be conscious of his degradation."

"There is some truth in that," remarked Mildred. "I know his high-spirited nature so well that I feel sure he would have endured five years of unutterable misery were he in his proper senses."

"Are there any well-authenticated instances of people recovering from downright, unmistakable attacks of madness?" demanded Clara.

"Hundreds !" replied Leonard. "The mind, like the body, is afflicted with diseases, and they are of the curable and incurable order. Even as the body recovers, so may the mind get well under able management and good treatment ; and, after all, where can my brother be better cared for than where he will shortly be?"

"Here, Leonard !" Mildred answered, her face flushing with a generous enthusiasm—"here, by my side, with kind friends, instead of strangers, around him ! No one, however well disposed, can rival a wife, a brother, or a mother in devoted attention to a dearly-loved relative."

"Five years will soon elapse," Leonard replied ; "and then you will have him again by your side. In the meantime you have your children to——"

"Poor fatherless darlings !" broke in Mildred, with a sob.

Clara slipped her arm round her cousin's waist, and kissing her lovingly, said, in a voice of reproof, "Mildred, Mildred, you must not give way like this. It is cowardly ; nay, more, it is rebellious. How can you, this night, upon your knees, conscientiously say, 'Thy will be done ;' when in your heart you murmur against your Heavenly Father, who, in His wisdom, has seen fit to send this trouble to you. To pass through the fire is to be purified ; to be chastened is to be loved. Are you the first member of a church always militant against evil who has had to take up a cross almost too heavy to bear ? Be strong—be firm, dear friend."

Mildred allowed her head to fall against Clara's breast, and gave way to a torrent of tears ; after which she pressed her hand, saying, "Thank you, very much ; I am better and stronger now."

It was some time before Leonard reopened the conversation ; when he did, he exclaimed, "You need be under no apprehension as to your future, Mildred, or that of your children. I have, thank goodness, sufficient for all of us, and you may always make my home your own. Clara is as much attached to you as I am. You need have no false delicacy about accepting my offer, for if people in distress are not to look for sympathy or assistance to their relatives, where are they to seek it ?"

"You are very kind, all very kind," said Mildred, gratefully ; "I thank you for myself and for my children."

In this way it was arranged that the bereaved wife—the wife, and yet no wife—the widow, and yet no widow, in fact or in law—should live with her relations; than whom kinder, simpler, or better-disposed creatures never existed. Religious and truly pious were they, without being puritanical or tainted with the schism of Pusey. They were what the backbone of the country, our glorious middle class, usually is—plain, truth-seeking, straightforward Christians; upright and honest in their dealings with all men; doing as they would be done unto, and happy in their simplicity.

A month passed, and one morning Mildred received a letter, which astonished her not a little. All were at breakfast. Seeing her turn pale on opening the letter, Leonard inquired what was the matter.

“It is from Varney Vaillant,” she replied.

“That is strange.”

“Will you read it to me?” Mildred said, handing him the epistle. “When I recollect the last note I received from him, I feel that I cannot with any patience look at the handwriting.”

“I can perfectly understand that,” replied Leonard, who proceeded to read the letter aloud. It ran:

“Mr. Vaillant presents his compliments to Mrs. Millington, and sincerely trusts that she will pardon the liberty he takes in addressing her. Being an invalid, confined during the greater part of the day to the house, he has lately had much opportunity for re-

flection; and the wish nearest his heart is to make some atonement for the calamity that, mainly through his instrumentality, has fallen upon her family and herself. He doesn't know how Mrs. Millington may be situated; but he has thought it fair to infer that her circumstances are not what they once were. Acting upon this inference, he has enclosed a draft upon his bankers for the amount of £500, of which he begs her acceptance. He has further, in all humility, exerted what little interest he possesses in her son's behalf. If he mistakes not, the boy is now of an age which would justify his being sent to a preparatory school. Christ's Hospital, otherwise known as the Bluecoat School, has a branch educational establishment for children at Hertford. To this truly excellent seminary he has procured him a nomination. Should Mrs. Millington feel pleased to avail herself of the draft or the nomination, Mr. Vaillant will experience an exalted sense of the liveliest gratification.

“17, Western Heights, Brighton.”

When Leonard had finished the perusal of this letter, he spread out the draft, and the paper containing Master John Millington's admission to the Bluecoat School, and for a moment there was silence, which Mildred broke.

“I cannot accept either,” she exclaimed. “So perhaps you will oblige me, Leonard, by writing a note to Mr. Vaillant, returning his presents, and thanking him, in proper terms, for sending them to me,”

"Not accept them! Why not?" asked Clara.

"Because I do not feel justified in doing so."

"See what you could do with the money, though," she urged. "You need not appropriate it to your own use. I don't blame you for having scruples about doing that, but devote it to charitable purposes. Will you tell me that it is not better in the pockets of the poor than in his? Oh, it would be sinful to return it!"

"Would not that be spoiling the Egyptians?" said Leonard, with a smile.

"It would be doing real practical good—that's the way I look at it!" she replied, sturdily. "We want a new church here, and we want some Sunday schools, and five hundred pounds would lay the nucleus of them. If some one subscribed that large sum, others would come forward with similar subscriptions."

"Perhaps," said Leonard; quietly adding, "the Bluecoat School is a very good one, and it is extremely difficult to get nominations for it. Before that is rejected, I think we ought to take time to consider."

"Only just reflect upon what has ensued through that man's officious interference with our affairs," Mildred said, in a tone of remonstrance. "I cannot bear to think even of receiving a favour at his hands. It seems to me so mean—so worthy of despal—so——"

She paused—her vocabulary becoming exhausted.

"Not so," Leonard said. "You will admit that he has injured you?"

"As far as that goes—yes."

"If a person injures anybody, the one that is injured has a moral, and, moreover, a legal right to expect reparation, and, as Vaillant appropriately expresses it, atonement. His way of doing it is to send you the draft, and the nomination. You being, as I have proved, entitled to them, need have no compunction in accepting them, because they are due to you."

"I am in your hands—act for me," replied Mildred, only half convinced.

"You authorize me to do so?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall write to Varney Vaillant, thanking him in your name. People do not get their sons so easily provided for every day."

"But I don't want to part with him."

"Yet he must be educated."

"That will involve a separation."

"I cannot deny it. It is a mother's fate to part with her children, sooner or later."

"No, no!" cried Mildred, in earnest accents, at the same time raising her little boy from his chair, and clasping him affectionately in her arms; I cannot part with him. Why may not Clara and I educate him at home? Some of our greatest men have, I believe, been brought up by the fire-side."

"And the apron-string," said Leonard, smiling.

"That may be true ; but public schools have, nevertheless, done much for the country."

"Do not speak of them !" Mildred replied, tearfully. "I know that you are right, for my reason tells me so ; but I cannot help looking upon those institutions, which rob mothers of their children, as cruel and dream-destroying."

Mildred should, with her experience of life, have known that there are many worse dream-destroyers, as she naively phrased it, than public schools.

Seeing that in speaking of schools he was only wounding her in a tender part, Leonard desisted, and said, "There is no immediate necessity for answering Vaillant's letter. Leave the acceptance or refusal of his offers an open question, until to-morrow or the next day. That will give you time for calm deliberation."

And so it was unanimously resolved that nothing should be done on the spur of the moment.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE VISIT TO THE MADHOUSE.

MUCH thought, much prayer, and some time sufficed to convince Mildred that she must not be selfish. It was clearly her duty to sacrifice her individual inclination to the interest of her child. Leonard wrote to Mr. Vaillant in becoming terms, and accepted both



his gifts; and shortly afterwards John, now seven years old, possessing only the naked rudiments of a very ordinary education, went into fertile Hertfordshire, and began his scholastic career, the curriculum of his studies being at once classical and useful.

Mildred felt very desolate when her darling left her. Those who are mothers can gauge the depth of her grief by their own; for the first parting with a loved child is always an epoch in a mother's life. When Charley or Bobby went to school is often as important a date to the maternal mind, as 1066, or the signing of Magna Charta, to a student of history.

Men do not live in such a little world. Events of greater importance and magnitude occupy their minds. Supposing they are "in the City"—that mysterious phrase—they will date from the panic in '49, when Bevis, Marks, & Co., at the head of the leather trade, "went," and a hundred minor houses toppled down, involved in their magnificent ruin; or they will think of the extraordinary year when the funds were as low as eighty-four, and the bank rate was eleven, it being difficult to discount good bills at anything but a ruinous interest.

There are some men who will talk about the year the battle of Inkerman, or that of Chillianwallah, was fought in; or the year the championship was contested in the prize-ring, the fight being won by a little Englishman against a big American.

But mothers live in a domesticated atmosphere, and to them the arrival of a new tooth is of more importance than all the vast transactions of Money-bags and Co. (Limited).

It is strange to note how the life of a human being will stagnate for a time, and then receive a sudden impetus which will endow it with an unwonted vitality. The hinges of action have for years been rusting ; the oil of life falls upon them, and they revolve without a murmur.

But little had occurred to disturb the serene and even flow of Clara's life-stream ; all the misfortunes had been her friends, not her own. She had, to a certain extent, owing to her devotion to those friends, participated in them ; but, nevertheless, they were not her own.

It was not her husband who came home intoxicated night after night, struck and robbed his wife, and otherwise shamed his manhood—it was not her husband who delivered his home into the hands of the brokers, and subsequently covered his name with infamy.

All at once, she awoke from her lethargic trance—all at once, she was raised from her subordinate position, and made the absolute mistress of a household. This change was welcome, because she had long expected it ; although, with the philosophic patience of those who have suffered at the hands of the world, she never considered anything perfected until it was actually accomplished.

Leonard and Clara were married under happy auspices. Their love was not a thing of sudden birth. It had been tried; and no one could say that, when weighed in the balance, it was found wanting.

The happy couple went to Paris, and passed the honeymoon there. Mildred remained at home with her little girl. At the expiration of a month, Leonard returned to Brixton, and to business. The firm of Barton, Brett, and Tomlins—though the leading man was dead, and Leonard a partner, the old name, for commercial purposes, was retained—had prospered of late, and was flourishing like a green bay-tree.

Leonard's income was a good one, but it was only commensurate with his exertions. He well deserved that which he received.

Mildred was in frequent communication with the head physician of the asylum in which John was placed, and the reports she received were not so favourable as she had been sanguine enough to expect.

She was informed that he was subject to periodical fits of violence, necessitating his confinement in a narrow cell, destitute of a single article of furniture, owing to his propensity for breaking and smashing all that came within his reach.

The doctors were divided in opinion as to whether this was a good or a bad sign. Some inclined to the former opinion—some to the latter. Wishing to have a clear idea as to her unfortunate husband's actual

condition, she proposed to Leonard that they should visit the asylum. He made no objection to the proposal; and it was finally arranged that they should go early some morning by railway.

One of those quarterly gaps in a school-life occurred, and Master John was sent home for the holidays.

Mildred, acting upon Leonard's advice, took the children with her, hoping that the sight of them might awaken some spark of recollection in her husband's brain, and forge a link to connect the chain of the past with that of the present—that chain which had been so rudely severed on board the *Morumbidgee*.

John had a vague idea of what had taken place, and Milly often asked where papa was. They were sure to know the truth some day. There are always kind friends at the elbows of our children, to tell them the misdeeds and shortcomings of their parents. So why should they not at once be made acquainted with what had happened? It would fall gently upon their dawning faculties; and the shock would not be nearly so great if the news was imparted gradually, as it would if blurted out when the inquiring mind began to assert its dignity, and ask questions.

John came back from Hertford in his strangely-cut coat and his yellow stockings, wearing bands round his throat like a clergyman or a barrister; used to existence without hats or caps, and never complaining of cold, even when the wind made his hair stand on end "like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

The asylum was a large mansion, standing in exten-

sive grounds of its own, surrounded by high walls, which it was impossible for the inmates to scale. The arrangements for the safe-keeping of the lunatics were perfect. They were classed. The dangerous were kept in strong rooms, under lock and key; those intermittently violent, were allowed a certain amount of liberty, and sedulously watched; those whose insanity was of a mild, idiotic kind, were permitted to wander about the spacious grounds; they had gardens given them, and they were granted the privilege of following any trade or amusement they had a fancy for.

Use is second nature; and the felon cobbler was unhappy without his last, and would have sighed miserably at losing his awl; the tailor had a fondness for his goose, and handled the needle with zest. There were some who had no inclination for anything—they passed their time in melancholy moping, talking incoherently to themselves.

Taking the asylum altogether, it presented human nature in its very worst aspect. Report said that a few of the inmates were more bad than mad, and that the skill of the counsel, engaged to defend them, alone prevented the law from taking their lives. If so, their position must have been worst of all, because they were able to feel their position, and knew that one rash and fatal act had for ever cast them off from all communion with their fellow-creatures.

John's disease had assumed a new phase. Instead of being mild and placable, he threw himself into

towering passions, and only the most experienced keepers, at times, dared approach him.

A majority of the doctors employed upon the establishment were of opinion that this was a good sign. It denoted activity of the brain, which was preferable to the listless, childish manner at first worn by him, which led them to think that his brain was softening through the combined effects of inebriation and sudden fright.

When they exhibited the order from the Home Office, which gave them the right of admittance, a warder was assigned them, and they were conducted to the cell in which John was languishing.

"He has been very mad, sir," the warder said, to Leonard; "but he is a little better now than he was."

"Is it safe for us to approach him?" asked Leonard.

How strange it seemed for a man to ask if he could, with safety, have an interview with his own brother? Truly, the death of intellect is ten times more melancholy than the death of the body.

"Quite safe, sir," answered the warder. "You will be shocked, I am afraid, to find him in the condition in which he is; but we are afraid to let him have any furniture. He has no weapon, and can do you no harm while I am with you. He fears me, for he knows that if I have any of his nonsense, I hit out straight from the shoulder, and knock him down as they do a bullock."

"Hush !" whispered Leonard. "You must not talk like that before his wife !"

"His wife !" cried the man, in the same tone. "I didn't know that, sir, and am very sorry if I have hurt her feelings, though I do assure you we are sometimes obliged to be severe in self-defence. With lunatics, there is nothing like meeting them half-way, and stopping them before they have power to be mischievous. It's astonishing how soon a good blow cowers them."

"So I should think," remarked Leonard, eyeing the man's huge frame and brawny fist with a curious look.

He was a formidable antagonist. His height was little under six feet, and he was as muscular as a prize-fighter. The lunatics, when refractory, must have been powerful, indeed, if they did not find a master in him.

Mildred trembled, and felt faint, when she heard her husband talked of as if he were a wild beast. This wreck and ruin of the mind was awful. She thought it would have been better to see him in a convict's dress, with a number on his back, in which his identity was merged, hewing stone at Portland Island, than to see him as she was presently to behold him.

To what had his dreadful propensity for intoxicating liquors brought him ! His mind had been wiped out of his brain, as a figure from a slate with a wet sponge. That warder, a year ago, would no more have dared to speak of her husband as he did,

than he would have attempted to fly from one of the Gothic towers of the asylum to the earth. He would have considered it a favour to black his boots, and yet he now talked of knocking him down like a bullock !

Strange cries, unearthly in their sound, assailed the ears of the party as they permeated the corridors. They were approaching that part where the dangerous lunatics were detained in durance. On entering the grounds they had met some pleasant-looking people, who smiled and nodded to them as they passed. These were the passive criminals, who gave little trouble, and were treated more like sheep than wolves.

The asylum resembled a kaleidoscope—many forms were to be seen in it.

A masterkey opened the door, which, when flung back, revealed John Millington, rising from a heap of straw—his hair matted and tangled—his face and hands begrimed with dirt—his clothing scanty—his eyes wild—and his appearance haggard in the extreme. He glared, rather than stared, at the intruders upon his privacy. They returned his gaze with anxiety, wondering if he would recognise them, but he did not.

With fury flashing from his eyes, and his whole frame trembling with excitement, he stood upright. The keeper spoke in a loud tone of voice to him, but he disregarded his notes of admonition. He clenched his fists, grated his teeth, rolled his eyes wildly, and



appeared about to make a ferocious attack upon his relations, when the little girl broke away from her mother's hand, toddled forward ere they could stop her, and stood at her father's feet, looking up in his altered face, scanning curiously his shaggy hair, covered with straw—his unkempt beard—and wondering why he "looked so funny," as she afterwards said.

"Oh, save my child—save her—save her!" cried Mildred, in the wildest alarm.

The keeper rushed forward to do so; but John was too quick for him. Holding the girl—*his* girl—tightly by the arm with his left hand, he dashed his fist into the keeper's face, and sent him rolling against the wall, against which he dashed with considerable force, falling stunned upon the floor.

Mildred nearly fainted with terror. Clara knew not what to do. She dared not pit her insignificant strength against that of a madman, and she looked appealingly at Leonard, who was turning up his coat-cuffs, preparatory to a struggle with his madman-brother.

To the surprise of all, John Millington did not dash his child after the warder, as had been expected. Perhaps there was some hidden sympathy between them. He took her up in his arms, kissed her twice tenderly, held her at arm's length, so that he might the better observe her pretty, half-formed features, kissed her again, placed her on the ground, when she slightly alarmed at the vehemence of his manner, ran away.

No sooner was she gone than the maniac sank upon his straw, and, clasping his hands in front of him, wept silently ; his tears coursed one another down his cheeks in quick succession, and he was strongly affected.

Mildred pushed her children out of the cell, and saying to Clara, "Mind them, please," went over to her husband, and kneeling on the hard floor, looked in his tear-stained face, caught his hands in hers, and exclaimed, "John, dear, dear John ! Oh ! do recognise—do *try* to think ! Will you, my darling ?"

He took no notice of her.

She cast a pitying glance at him, and mingled her tears with his. Leonard approached, and said, "Not now, Milly, dear ; not *now*."

She bent forward and kissed that hirsute, stolid face not once, not twice, not thrice ; but a multitude of times. Then she rose ; the maniac, unconscious of the passionate, fond caress, continued to weep.

"You are right," Mildred exclaimed, when on her feet. "The time has not arrived ; it would be cruel to awaken him now if we had the power to do so ; but when I saw his face—oh ! Leonard, when I saw his face, with the tears streaming down his cheeks—believe me when I say that I thought him my own again."

So intent had all been upon John, that no one had paid the prostrate keeper any attention. Leonard now dragged him by the heels out of the cell, and laid him in the passage, locking the door to preclude the possibility of a repetition of the outrage.

He was not long in coming to himself. Clara had a vinaigrette, and held it under his nose, which revived him. The pungent odour he inhaled made him wake, with a start. Looking about him oddly at first, he soon recollected himself, and said, "I hope you are not hurt, sir!"

"Not at all."

"Or the ladies?"

"No."

"And the child?"

"Is safe."

Mildred beckoned Leonard to her, and said, "Give him something," pointing to the keeper.

"I intend to."

"Something handsome, I mean."

"Why?"

"He may illtreat John in revenge for what happened just now," Mildred said, earnestly.

"Oh, I see; that shall be arranged," replied Leonard, who returned to the keeper, and exclaimed, "Here are a couple of sovereigns for you. I hope you will not illtreat the poor fellow for what he has done."

The man looked astonished, and said, "You must have heard strange tales of us keepers, sir, for we never do anything of that sort. If we strike a lunatic, it is always in self-defence; and if they had the sense to speak, they would tell you so. Oh, no! If they are never treated worse than they are here, they will not come to any great harm."

Leonard turned away satisfied, gave Mildred his arm, and the party left the asylum, sadder, if not wiser, than they were when they entered it.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### IN THE MADHOUSE.

THAT time flies, is proverbial ; and anything proverbial, is popularly supposed to be so matter-of-fact, as to be beyond the power of contradiction.

Yet there are exceptions to every rule, for with John Millington time stood still. His mind was a huge blank space, from which everything had been obliterated. When he tried to look into himself, it was like looking into the whites of his eyes. The effort was resultless.

As the years multiplied themselves, John's case improved. The doctors began to look hopefully upon him. His violent paroxysms passed away. A dreadful period was that he passed in his transition from insanity to a state of sanity. At first he grappled feebly with ideas, and arrived at a dim consciousness that he was a human being ; that some things were good to the palate, and some bad ; that the whips of the keepers, when applied to his shoulders, caused him pain, and that the whips were only so applied when he was alarmingly insubordinate. He deduced an inference from this, which was, that it was best for him

to curb the evil spirit which possessed him, and keep quiet.

When he was in a condition of quietude, they treated him more kindly. He had a garden to walk in, and books with pictures in them were given him to please his fancy, and stimulate the powers of the imagination. Fancy a man, whose intellect had once been gigantic, standing in need of such a stimulant ! How humiliating to the man of genius, to think that the common accidents of every-day life may cause the cleverness on which he prides himself to topple to its base, and become an abject ruin ! How shocking to imagine—nay, to know—that a man may, and can, sink to the level of an animal, and be treated worse than any beast ; for a beast of the field has ever its market value, whilst a lunatic is not worth a penny-piece to the world or to his friends—he simply cumbars the earth.

And yet this same lunacy is not the worst affliction which can befall a man. It brings oblivion in its train, If the mind is deprived of the power of thinking, it cannot brood over, and feel its position, or that of the body in which it is encased ; but in all conscience, it is awful enough ; and John was to be congratulated at being able, as the doctor said, to pull through it.

Mildred made half-yearly inquiries after her husband, and for the first three years the replies she received to those queries were depressing enough to make her abandon hope ; for it was not until the beginning of the fourth year that he recovered in the slightest degree.

At length she fell into a desponding state, and ceased to make any inquiries, thinking it was a moral impossibility for John to get better, and that when the sentence which had been passed upon him expired, she would have to employ a keeper to watch his every movement—to regulate his actions.

This was truly a forlorn prospect to look forward to; but, even in her most sanguine moments, she could hope for nothing else. It consequently happened that during the last years of John's imprisonment, she in a manner, allowed him to die out of her memory. So that the report of his gradual recovery, which she could have verified, was not communicated to her, and she remained in ignorance of the happy change.

The fact was, Mildred wrapped herself up in her children. The female heart must have something to cling to.

When John Millington's term of captivity had approached its last thirty days, he was examined by a commissioner, specially appointed for the purpose.

John was taking what is called "recreation" in the grounds when the commissioner's eye lighted on him. It is the custom of commissioner's in lunacy to select their own cases. They do not trust entirely to the governors or masters of asylums. They go into every room and part of the house, and put questions to all whom they think capable of replying to their interrogatories.

"What is this man here for?" he inquired.

"Five years' imprisonment, sir, for attempted murder."

"Out of his mind at the time?"

"No, sir. Went off after," replied the keeper.

"Bad case?" asked the commissioner.

"No, sir; I've heard the contrary. I did see the newspaper report; but it is so long ago, and we have so many things to think of, that I almost forget. You'll see it on the governor's books, sir. I rather fancy it was this way. Some Frenchman ran away with his wife, and he knocked him down with a stick, and the police caught him on board an Australian clipper. The shock upset him, and drove him mad; so instead of sending him to Portland, to work out his five years, they sent him here."

"Thank you," said the commissioner. "How has he behaved lately?"

"Very violent at first, sir; tame as a cat now, and, for my part, I don't see much the matter with him."

"Who has made the weekly report to the governor?"

"I have, sir."

"That will do. Stay! One moment more," added the commissioner.

"Have his friends been to see him lately?"

"No, sir. They seem to have given him up this two years."

"Any letter from them?"

"Not a line, sir."

"You may go."

The keeper went away, and when his back was turned, John, who was sitting on a rustic chair reading, and who had overheard this conversation, put down his book, and approaching the commissioner, said, in a most reasonable manner, "I think you were talking about me, sir?"

"We were. How do you find yourself, lately?" replied the commissioner.

"Very much better," replied John. "In fact, I am so much better, that I look upon myself as recovered; thanks to the kind attention of the people with whom I have been placed."

"Do you know why you were sent here?"

"Do I know?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I do. Allow me to acquaint you with the story in detail, if it will not weary you?"

"Not at all."

"To begin, then," said John. "A Frenchman of fortune, with whom I was unhappily acquainted, insinuated himself into my confidence, and endeavoured to run away with my wife. I detected him in the act, by the purest accident, and frustrated his wicked intention."

"You attempted to run away with the Frenchman's wife?" said the commissioner, wishing to puzzle him.

"No, no!"

"That was very wrong of you."

"You misunderstand me, sir," said John. "Mr.



Varney Vaillant, the man I am speaking about, had recourse to all sorts of strategy."

"What is that?"

"Strategy?"

"Yes."

"Strictly speaking, a warlike manœuvre; but it has crept into modern parlance," answered John.

"Very well. Go on," said the commissioner, having increased faith in John Millington's recovered sanity.

"All Vaillant's efforts were directed against my wife's allegiance," continued John; "but I was so blind that I did not see it. Finding that he could make no way with her, but was continually losing ground, he determined upon an attempt to carry her off."

"Where?" asked the commissioner, leaning his back against a tree, and placidly smoking a cigar.

"Oh! that is more than I can tell you. I happened to meet him when my wife was struggling in his arms, and though I did not know who the lady was, I interfered and struck him."

"You did not know?"

"As heaven is my judge."

"But how was that?" asked the commissioner, who was, by profession, a mental anatomist.

"I was drinking in a tavern hard by, when I heard the cries of a woman in distress. I rushed to her assistance, and struck the man without knowing who he was, or having the remotest clue to the identity of the woman."

"Is that so?"

"Is it so, my dear sir? I refer you to the published reports of the trial," said John.

"Ah!" said the commissioner. "I will make a point of referring to them. Let me see; I think I remember your case."

"Very likely. It must have been notorious."

"Why do you say 'it must have been?'"

"Because I have no recollection of the trial."

"None?"

"None whatever; but when I recall the incidents, I know that they had the elements of notoriety in them."

"Were you not an artist of some celebrity?"

"No--an architect."

"An architect? I beg your pardon. If I recollect, you were overtaken by the police at Carlisle, attempting to escape in an express train?"

"You are wrong again, sir," said John, with a smile. "It was on board an Australian clipper, named Morumbidgee; and the shock must have driven me mad, for I remember nothing after that, so it is useless to question me."

"You are unmarried?"

"No, I have a wife and two children."

"Whom you long to see again?"

"Well--yes; but I shall not see them for some time" replied John.

"How so? Are you ignorant of the term of your sentence?" asked the commissioner, thinking he had caught him tripping at last.

"I have been told that it is five years, and expires in a month."

"You have been told! Did you hear it at the trial!"

"How could I? Yet stay—I *heard* it, I suppose; but the mere fact of hearing did not carry intelligence with it, for I was mad,"

"You are not mad now?"

"I fancy not," answered John. "But you, who are acquainted with these cases, ought to know better than me."

"My knowledge is only superficial," replied the commissioner. "Will you tell me what you intend to do should you be released?"

"I have no objection to tell you what my plans are. I shall change my name, and conceal my existence from my family until I have retrieved my character and my position. When I feel myself worthy to associate with my wife, who is an angel, and to guide my children, who, I hope and trust, resemble her more than they do me!"

"Why do you wish that?"

"I wish it because I have led a detestable life, and I would rather see my children in their graves than see them follow my pernicious example!"

"Have you any means of obtaining a livelihood when you leave here—supposing you should be discharged?" inquired the commissioner.

"Oh, yes!" John exclaimed; "I am an architect, and architectural draughtsman."

"I wish you would draw a sketch of a country house, with external ornamentation and internal sections. A friend of mine will find it invaluable, and pay you well."

"I do not care about remuneration," said John. "I shall be only too glad to oblige you, if you will provide me with [paper and pens, ink, &c."

"You shall have them, if you don't mind waiting a short time?"

"As long as you like. I am entirely at your service," replied John.

The commissioner went away to order the necessary paraphernalia, and John took up his book, with which he amused himself during the great man's absence. His replies had been satisfactory enough, but the commissioner wished to test him in every way before he pronounced him finally cured. The materials were brought, and John made a capital sketch, artistically correct, and in every way perfect.

In three weeks' time, he was a free man.

The taint of the gaol-bird and the felon was upon him, but few who saw him walk through the streets knew the fact.

His secret was his own, and he did his best to keep it.

Free!

He could hardly bring himself to believe in the glorious certainty, but it was true. And not only that

—he was more than that ; he was himself again—he was sane !

\* \* \* \* \*

A few years' absence from any particular place makes more impression upon a thoughtful mind than anything else. It seems so strange to find that those with whom we were intimately acquainted, and whom we left in the bloom of youth and health, are dead, or gone away ; children left at school are grown up and married—perhaps have children of their own ; some who were left in riches have been reduced to poverty ; happy homes reduced to wreck and ruin, and an utter and complete metamorphosis effected.

When John was dismissed by the prison officials, and sent forth into the open air, beneath the glare of a distant sun, a free man, he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

How little did he imagine, when he made his first start in life, that dark clouds would overshadow his path—that he would bring his family to ruin—that he himself would be imprisoned, and then lose all account of time !

He was afraid to dwell too much on the past, lest his reason should be again shattered. He confined himself to the present, with an occasional hopeful thought directed to the future.

When he had retrieved his character, and made himself a new position, he would reveal himself to his wife, and endeavour to atone for the misery which he had formerly inflicted on her.

This was a praiseworthy resolution, and one he felt himself strong enough to carry out. He had thought much over it in the convict prison, and was confident that, as Simon Leslie, he would gain that popularity, respect, and wealth, which, as John Millington, he had forfeited, and lost for ever.

They gave him what little money was found upon him when arrested on board the *Morumbidgee*, and with that he went to London, hoping, in that vast maelstrom of human life, to lose his identity. Nor was he mistaken.

Under the name of Simon Leslie, he took offices, and, by making applications in proper channels, and bringing himself in contact with the right sort of men, he obtained work, and, as a natural consequence, money.

He bought a brassplate, and had "*Simon Leslie Architect*," engraved on it ; and learnt to sign his new name to his letters with fluency. Yet, in the midst of his solitude, he yearned for the society of his wife and children. He longed to throw off his disguise, and ask Mildred to bear him company in his struggle with the world.

But no.

He had atonement to make for past misdeeds, and, with the determination of a Spartan or a stoic, he resolved to go through the fiery ordeal, until his soul was as clean as if it had been purged with hyssop.

And what was his wife doing all this time ?

You shall hear.

On the morning of the day upon which John Millington, otherwise Simon Leslie, was released, the iron horse dashed into the railway station like a thing of life, and deposited Mildred upon the platform. She was by herself, thinking that the sight of many old friends might be productive of excitement, which would prove pernicious.

It was her intention to take her afflicted husband away with her, and pass the remainder of her existence in ministering to a mind diseased.

A cab took her to the gate of the asylum, and she was asked by the porter what her business was.

"I want to see an inmate of the asylum, if you please," Mildred replied, timidly.

"Have you an order?"

"No, I have not. I did not think it would be necessary."

"No one is admitted without an order," said the porter. "You can send your card to the governor, though, if you like, and he will, no doubt, give you the required permission."

"I really think you will find all that formality unnecessary," Mildred exclaimed; "because the inmate's term of confinement expires to-day."

"Indeed! Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure!" replied Mildred, who had so carefully treasured up the date that she knew it was an impossibility for her to make an error.

"What name?" asked the porter.

"John Millington."

"Right, ma'am !" the porter exclaimed. "John Millington has been gone this two hours."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"That is more than we know. He was passed out cured, for I have an entry on my books to that effect."

"Gone! Cured! Oh, heaven!" Mildred exclaimed.

To hear that his sanity was re-established was more than she had hoped for. When she was told he had gone, her first impression was that he had some clue to Leonard's dwelling-place, or would go to the place of business sacred to the commercial efforts of Barton, Brett, and Tomlins,

So she hurriedly thanked the porter, drove back to the station, and waited for the first up-train. She longed to clasp her husband in her arms, and call him her own once more, after the lapse of five dreadful years, which had been passed almost without hope.

What a pride he would take in his children, she thought. How he would pet his little girl, and see in her face the image of his wife—her mother! And the boy, now nearly eleven years old. He would see that she had brought them up to reverence and revere him! He would find that not one disparaging word from her lips had ever sullied his fame! She had laboured earnestly to teach the children to pray for and love him. "God bless papa!" were household words in their mouths, night and morning.

At last, up came the train; and Mildred was soon again in London.



When she reached home, Clara was surprised to see nothing of John.

"Why, my dear !" she exclaimed, "where is John ? Is there any mistake ?"

"Oh, no—none whatever ! I have glorious news for you !" replied Mildred.

"Glorious ?"

"Yes ; wonderfully so ! John was discharged cured this morning, and started all by himself—all by himself, Clara, for London !"

"That is, indeed, excellent news ! I congratulate you most heartily ! Do you think he will find his way here ?"

"Scarcely ; but he will, of course, go to the City, and find Leonard at the counting-house !"

"Yes ; that will be his plan. It is, indeed, glorious news !" said Clara.

At six o'clock, punctual, Mr. Leonard arrived, but without his brother. Blank consternation took possession of all parties.

"Why, wh—where's John ?" queried Mildred, trembling like an aspen. .

"John ! Why should you ask me ?" replied Leonard.

"Have you not seen him ?"

"I ! Not for a moment."

"Come, you are joking with me ! Let him come in. Do, for heaven's sake, Leonard ! I can't bear it ! My heart is in my mouth already—I can't, indeed, bear it !"

'As heaven hears me, I know nothing of my

brother !" said Leonard. " I fully expected that you would have brought him with you."

Mildred took a glance—a rapid, sweeping, questioning glance—at Leonard's face. That glance convinced her that he was speaking the truth ; and, with a hopeless expression of countenance, she sank back on a sofa, saying, in a moaning voice, " He has deserted me !—deserted me !—deserted me ! And I am alone in the world. Why—why cannot I die ?"

It was fortunate for Simon Leslie, *alias* John Millington, that this scene was absent from his eyes, or it would, assuredly, have disarranged his domestic economy.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HIS FRIEND—HIS ENEMY—HIS FATE.

It was in the early part of December. Brighton was very full, as it usually is before Christmas. Fashionable people congregate in this city by the sea at various parts of the year, but always more at the close than any other.

John Millington was at Brighton, but his visit did not take place through a wish to enjoy a week's holiday. He was under a stern discipline. He had much to do—an end to accomplish—a scheme to work out ; and there were no holidays, no relaxation, no pleasure, except in hard, unremitting toil, for him, until he had done all that he had set before himself.

He was a teetotaller in the strictest sense of the term, and he had tasted nothing stronger than water since his arrest on board the Australian emigrant ship, save and except a few tablespoonfuls of brandy administered by the surgeon in the lunatic asylum when he was ill, and too weak to take proper nourishment.

His determination and perseverance in this respect were worthy of the greatest praise. He found employment ready to his hand, and he executed all the work that was entrusted to him with such elaborate care and conscientious truth, that he was rapidly rising into favour.

With work came money; and when he accumulated fifty pounds, which did not take him long in doing, he opened a banking account. With what pleasure did he receive his cheque-book; with what delight did he look over the monthly return of the balance in his favour, and say, with a sigh of pleasure, "All for my wife—all for my wife!"

Those with whom he was acquainted soon came to know that he was a saving man, and had money at his banker's; then they endeavoured to borrow some from him, but all their pressing solicitations were insufficient to extort the value of a pennypiece from Simon Leslie.

John Millington had been liberal enough with his money. He had been lavish, prodigal, wickedly wasteful. But Simon Leslie was a different sort of person altogether. He begrudged a wayside beggar a penny

saying that he and others payed poor-rates, and that promiscuous almsgiving was superfluous charity. He was becoming a social economist.

He never saw a drunken man without a shudder, and an involuntary throbbing of the brain.

"Poor wretch!" he would murmur. "If his eyes could only be opened as mine have been?"

And now, what took him to Brighton? It was not pleasure. Then it must have been business. The intelligent reader, in coming to this conclusion, will have surmised correctly. It was business. He had been employed and commissioned to erect a large hotel in the interests of a company, and this task, which was the most important and herculean he had yet undertaken, required his almost continual presence on the spot.

He had to direct the builders, and see that his plans were carried out to the letter. In the chairman of the company he had a firm and fast friend. This gentleman had been a City man all his life, and he admired and appreciated industry and talent whenever he met with them.

As Mr. Fernandez, the gentleman alluded to, lived at Brighton, going to, and returning from, town by railway whenever it was necessary for him to do so, he was a great deal with John, and the latter was a frequent guest at his house, one of the largest mansions in Brunswick Square.

Mr. Fernandez had a daughter, an only child—the darling of her mother and father. It was currently

reported that Julia Fernandez would have a large fortune when she married, and many young men buzzed about her as butterflies around a handsome flower.

At the commencement of his intercourse with the chairman of the company, John feared that Julia might take a girlish fancy to him, and in order to render such an event improbable, he kept away from the house as much as he could, consistently with common civility.

The dull, red, full December sun was standing high in the heavens; a clear, crisp atmosphere prevailed, without any symptoms of frost. The sea was still and calm; the sleepy wavelets broke pleasantly against the chingly beach. John was walking pensively up and down, in front of some machines, placed high and dry, out of the way for the winter.

All at once he was confronted by Mr. Fernandez and his daughter; the hearty voice of the former, ringing in his ears as he wished him a very good morning,

Julia Fernandez wore a light linsey skirt, surmounted by a particularly handsome jacket, made of seal-skin. She had on a hat, ornamented with a grebe feather, and her hands were encased in a muff of the same material.

Her hair was light; her features small, delicate, and pretty. She was a fragile, unassuming beauty, rather than dashing and impetuous.

Looking archly at John, she exclaimed, "How very grave you look, Mr. Leslie; are you preparing some grand architectural triumph, which shall be an eighth wonder of the world?"

"No," he replied, with a slight tinge of sadness in his tone; "I was thinking of old times."

"Indeed! I have heard that retrospection is occasionally very charming."

"It may be."

"You say that as if you did not think so."

"Nor do I. That is to say, I did not find it so in my own case."

"Those who are well versed in the movements of the barometer seem to say that we shall have a wet Christmas," exclaimed Mr. Fernandez.

"That is nothing unusual of late papa," chimed in Julia.

"So much the better for the hotel," said John. "We shall finish it by the end of March or April, if the weather is not adverse."

"That is a very professional remark, Mr. Leslie," said Julia, "and I for one protest against it. Christmas is not a good old-fashioned Christmas without snow and frost. Wet and cold damp-laden winds may be very well from an architectural point of view; but other people besides those who build have a right to speak to the clerk of the weather."

"The poor, for instance," said John; "what will they say to frost and snow?"

"Oh! I don't know. I think when it is cold,

people who are rich give more freely to the necessitous."

"Possibly that is so ; but you seem to forget that manhood, whether rich or poor, has its pride ; and the frozen-out-gardener would not beg if he could get his spade into the soil. To supplicate for the bare necessities of life is not the normal attitude of the British Workman, who would much rather work till he fainted with exertion. Think of the two hundred men we employ on the adjoining works. If a six weeks' frost set in, what would become of them?"

Julia blushed, and made no answer. Mr. Fernandez looked at her ; and, seeing that she was inclined to cry, he laid his hand upon her shoulder and said, "Never mind, my poor little puss. Mr. Leslie is rather too hard upon you. It will teach you how to choose your subject for an argument more carefully another time."

Julia told her father that he had better go and talk architecture to Mr. Leslie, who was a bear that morning, and that she would sit down somewhere until he returned. She had a book under her arm, and was soon absorbed in the engrossing pages of some sensational novel—such as delights the minds of the rising generation of young ladies.

And here it may be observed that the sensational element in novels seems to have driven the sentimental far into the background. The early British novelists of forty and fifty years ago, are now scarce tolerated on a dusty bookshelf. So much for fame. Are we more

practical than our ancestors? Is there more cast iron and adamant in our natures? Do we despise feeling, as only fit for boys and girls? These are questions for philosophers, and to such we leave them.

As John and Mr. Fernandez were walking towards the hotel, they encountered a Bath-chair. In the Bath-chair was a man, upon whom John had no sooner looked than he trembled violently. He walked faster, and endeavoured, in his agitation, to drag Fernandez with him; but the latter exclaimed, stopping the while, "Pray excuse me a moment! An old friend of mine! Poor fellow! Much afflicted! Sad case! Tell you all presently!"

The invalid had recognised Mr. Fernandez, and, with a smile, extended his hand, saying, "I hope the good work is progressing?" pointing to the hotel, as he spoke.

The huge pile was rapidly rising into the air, and showed substantially that it was in a fair state of progression, so Fernandez replied, "Judge for yourself."

"Is that gentleman, who was with you, the architect?" inquired the invalid.

"He is."

"May I ask his name?"

"Simon Leslie."

"Leslie—Leslie! Ah, I must be mistaken! But do you know he bears such a marvellous resemblance to a friend of mine. If it were not for his beard and whiskers, I could swear——But no; it is a mistake. Yet I should like to be introduced to him. Where do you dine to-night?"



"I had purposed dining at home, *en famille* ; but——"

"Thanks. You will dine with me ! Bring Mr. Leslie with you. I am staying at 'The Bedford.'"

"Yes ; I know."

"At six I shall expect you."

"I will be there."

Mr. Fernandez bowed. The attendant whirled the chair on, and the chairman of the company rejoined the architect, who had crossed the road, and was standing in front of the entrance to the works, wrapped in deep thought.

"Leslie !" exclaimed Mr. Fernandez.

"Eh !—what ? I beg your pardon ! You startled me !" replied John, looking up.

"You were quite in a brown study," said Fernandez, with a laugh. "That is always the way with you conscientious workers. What were you thinking of, eh ? Tell me. Open confession is good for the soul. Was it the height of the last Corinthian pillar, or——"

"I was thinking that——"

He broke off abruptly. He had been about to say, "I was thinking that I had seen that man's face somewhere ;" but it all at once occurred to him that the remark might turn out to be an imprudent one.

"Well, out with it," said Mr. Fernandez.

"Your supposition was correct, my dear sir. It was the height of the Corinthian column which occupied my thoughts."

"I thought so," returned Mr. Fernandez. "By the way, where are you going to dine to-night?"

"To dine?"

"Yes."

"At my lodgings. I have ordered something in the shape of game. Will you come and partake?"

"That is precisely what I was going to ask you to do. The fact is, I have received an invitation from an old friend of mine, who is anxious to be introduced to you, and I have promised to bring you."

"Promised?"

"That is to say, as far as I could promise without having previously gained your consent."

"Who is your friend?" asked John.

"The invalid you saw me speaking to just now."

"Ah, yes," returned John, drily; "you were kind enough to say you would tell me all about him."

"So I will, with pleasure. His is a sad case, as I gave you to understand. He is a Frenchman."

"Yes," said John, leaning against a pile of bricks, and breathing heavily.

"Some six or seven years ago—I tell you the story roughly, as I have heard it—he took a fancy to another man's wife, and, to his shame, endeavoured to abduct her. The husband happened to arrive at the critical moment, and there was a fight, I believe, in which the Frenchman received such frightful injuries as to nearly occasion his death. He recovered; but his spine was injured, and he can only hobble about with a stick, which is so painful that he prefers a chair."

"Quite a romance," John said, forcing a smile.

"Yes—it is romantic. I forgot to tell you that he fancied he had seen you before ; but when I told him your name, he said he must be mistaken."

"People sometimes detect strange likenesses."

"Yes, they do."

"What is your friend's name ?" John inquired

"Varney Vaillant."

John sat down on a few bricks which had detached themselves from the pile and fallen on the ground. He was white and ill ; and Fernandez, seeing it, said sympathetically, with evident concern, "You are ill ?"

"A passing giddiness."

"Is that all ?"

"Nothing more."

A glass of cold water, brought by one of the workmen, revived him, and he walked over the works with Fernandez, talking about business matters with his usual acumen. At four o'clock, when the men left off their daily toil, Fernandez said—

"Shall I call for you ?"

"For what purpose ?" demanded John.

"To go to dinner with Varney Vaillant."

"You must really have the kindness to excuse me," John said, in an apologetic tone. "I feel too ill to go anywhere, to-day. Another time I shall be happy."

"Will you not strain a point ? We need not stay."

"Thank you, no. Some other day."

"You have been working a little too hard, I am afraid, Leslie. Rest will do you good, however, so I

will not press you. Good-night. I must be off to dress."

John, left to himself, walked slowly home. Of late, Varney Vaillant had faded from his memory; he was but a shadowy phantom of the past; but he had at last seen him in the flesh, and the sight had upset his equanimity, and unsettled him.

It was true that the unfortunate Frenchman had brought his fate upon himself, but John was shocked to see that he had been the cause of such life-long suffering.

As the process of thought went on, his pity was mingled with hatred. He felt that he had much to detest Vaillant for. Had there been no Vaillant, there would have been no attempted murder—no paralysis of the brain—no dreadful captivity—no separation from wife and family.

About three weeks afterwards, Mr. Fernandez gave him an invitation to a dinner-party, which he accepted without hesitation. He went. Six o'clock, the hour appointed, struck, and yet the guests lingered in the drawing-room.

Was the cook dilatory, or was some bidden one after time? The time passed before dinner is never so pleasant as that which comes after; when people are kept waiting, discontented spirits are apt to grumble.

There was a knock—a ring—and Mr. Fernandez exclaimed, "At last! Let us descend. We will not trouble him to come up. It is so much labour to an invalid."

John changed colour. This remark probably alluded

to Varney Vaillant. He offered his arm to Julia, and descended the stairs. On entering the brilliantly-lighted dining-room, the first object he saw, already seated at the table, was his friend—his enemy—his fate—Varney Vaillant!

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### TEMPTATION—RECKONING WITHOUT THE HOST.

THE guests assembled at Mr. Fernandez's hospitable board did not belong to the *creme de la creme* of society. They belonged chiefly to the commercial class, though with one notable exception, in the form of an admiral.

But the company passed unnoticed by John Millington; he had eyes for nobody but Varney Vaillant—he could think of nobody else. His thoughts travelled back with lightning-like rapidity to the dreadful night on which he struck down the cowardly assassin of his wife's honour. Well, well—he could afford to be generous, and let all animosity die away and perish. They had both passed through the fire, but John had the advantage over the Frenchman, whose health and strength were utterly destroyed.

In spite of his physical disabilities, the Frenchman's mental powers were not much impaired. If he talked too long, he became a little weak; but this lassitude flew quickly away when attacked by a stimulant. His manner was still polished, his suavity was increased, and every one found him an agreeable companion.

He returned John's fixed gaze for an instant, but was too polite to keep his eyes riveted upon him for any length of time ; and John, to distract his attention, talked incessantly to Julia Fernandez, who seemed highly pleased at his notice.

Admiral Pillager related how he once, with his own hands, threw a shell overboard, when the explosive weapon of warfare had its fusee lighted, and was ready to go off at a moment's notice. He spoke of albatrosses and other birds of ill-omen, and told stories of ships being wrecked, after the wilful killing of such feathered forerunners of disaster.

These remarks brought on a general discussion relative to the superstitions and singular sensations to be met with amongst the various members of the human race. John contributed his quota, saying, " I once knew a man who was so extremely nervous that he could not pass a particular house without shuddering violently, and almost sinking to the ground.

" Indeed !" said a lady ; " that is very singular. I am a very nervous person, and my daughter once fainted at the smell of a rose. I should esteem it a favour, sir, if you would tell me the number of the house, and the name of the street, so that I might go there and see if it would similarly affect me."

" I will do so with pleasure," replied John, affably. " I really forget the number, but the house is situated in Monkmaiden Street, which runs out of the Hampstead Road. It is a very old and dismal-looking house which has evidently not been tenanted for years."

"Oh, how charming! I shall certainly go," said the lady, who was romantic, and had read the "Nightside of Nature." "Perhaps the house contains some frightful mystery."

"It may be so," replied John.

After dinner, the ladies retired, and the wine passed freely. John was pressed to drink, but he shook his head, and smiled a negative.

Varney Vaillant filled his glass, and said, "I will venture to propose a toast which even the most abstemious do not feel justified in refusing. I mean 'The ladies!'"

The toast was received with acclamation. When the expression of approval had subsided, John said, "If you mean the word abstemious to apply to me, I beg to state that I shall be glad to drink the toast; but I claim the privilege of doing so in water."

"No, no, my dear sir," said Admiral Pillager; "that would be an insult to the entire sex."

"One glass—half full, Leslie!" said Mr. Fernandez.

"I am sorry to refuse, gentlemen; more especially as your invitation is so pressing and general; but it is so contrary to my general habits."

"And always has been," interposed Varney Vaillant; but whether in the tone of a query, or a remark made from previous knowledge, it was difficult to say.

"Pray, what construction am I to put upon that observation?" asked John, angrily.

"The simplest it will bear," replied Vaillant.

“It was merely a remark of no importance, and without meaning,” exclaimed Mr. Fernandez. “My friend, Mr. Vaillant, wished to know whether you have always confined yourself to water.”

“Mr. Vaillant has asked me a question, which, coming from a perfect stranger, such as he is to me, is impertinent, and I refuse to gratify his obtrusive curiosity.”

Admiral Pillager left off talking about the Sphinx, and Cleopatra’s needle, and other strange sights he had seen when cruising in the Med., as he called the Mediterranean, and stared at John, as if he was surprised at a member of the plutocracy losing his temper. He never gave them credit for good manners or breeding, and he did not expect either quickness of perception, or courage to resent an impertinence.

Varney Vaillant took the bottle in his hand, and, leaning as far over the table as he was able, which brought him within a very short distance of John said, “Pardon my ‘obtrusive curiosity,’ and drown your animosity in a glass of wine.”

John was about to make a reply, when the Frenchman lowered his voice to a whisper, only audible to him to whom it was directed, and said, “*For the sake of days gone by, just one glass—John Millington !*”

The effect of this speech upon John was not so electrical as Varney Vaillant expected it would be.

He sat erect and rigid, like one cut out of stone. Not a fibre moved—not a muscle quivered; but he neither swooned, nor appeared in the slightest degree alarmed.



This quietude astounded Varney Vaillant.

The Frenchman, as astute and cunning as of yore, had come to the conclusion that he had, in Simon Leslie, discovered John Millington—the man who had wrought him so much evil, or, rather, from whom so much evil had recoiled upon its projector. But when the man took so little notice of his exclamation, he began to alter his opinion.

“I am really at a loss to understand you,” John said.

“Did I speak too low for you to catch the full significance of my words?”

“Not at all. But why you should address me in a whisper, as John Millington, when my name is Simon Leslie, I cannot comprehend.”

This was said openly, and aloud, so that all heard it, much to Vaillant’s confusion.

“I beg your pardon,” he said; “I have, *perhaps*, been misled by an accidental resemblance.”

“‘Perhaps’ may answer your purpose, but it will not answer mine, sir,” John exclaimed, warmly. “My name is, as I had the honour of telling you before, Simon Leslie. Those who are acquainted with me, take my word, and I demand to know what you mean by saying ‘perhaps?’ You have been misled by an accidental resemblance.”

“I mistook you for a man named Millington,” said Varney Vaillant, still keeping his eyes fixed upon him, and watching eagerly for any change in his countenance which would give a colour to his assertions.

"And who was this Millington?" John asked, unflinchingly.

"A man who attempted my life."

Laughing scornfully, John rose from his chair, and making an inclination of a respectful nature to Mr. Fernandez, exclaimed, "Upon my honour, this is going too far. I hope you will allow me to withdraw?"

"Nothing of the sort, Leslie. Sit down," said Mr. Fernandez, much annoyed. "Let me throw oil upon the troubled waters. Mr. Vaillant did not intend to insult you. He will be the first to disavow any intention of the sort. I will guarantee that."

Neither John nor Varney Vaillant uttered a word.

"May I mediate in this matter?" interposed Admiral Pillager. "I am an old man, and have served four Sovereigns—George the Third and Fourth, William, and Victoria. So you may imagine that I have had some experience in these affairs. Oh, yes! Men who work under the Crown are mettlesome, and a hasty word, susceptible of two interpretations, has often led to disastrous results."

"Quite so!" said Mr. Fernandez. "Go on, admiral."

"Mr. Vaillant—I think you said the gentleman's name was Vaillant?—I met a most accomplished officer of that name at Balaklava; but that is neither here nor there. Mr. Vaillant has fancied a resemblance in Mr. Leslie, whom we all know as a talented and highly accomplished man of position. The resemblance, I grant you, was not flattering, and in my opinion Mr. Leslie has a right to an apology."

"He will have none from me," answered Vaillant, doggedly.

"My dear sir——"

"Thanks for your kindness in interfering; but I cannot consent to submit the matter in dispute to your arbitrament."

"To mine, then?" said Mr. Fernandez.

"Nor to yours! If Mr. Leslie has the misfortune to resemble a man who was tried for the crime of attempted murder, I am sorry for him. He has my sympathy. But he surely is not justified in picking a quarrel with me because I trace the resemblance."

"I presume you were an acquaintance of this man's?" said Admiral Pillager, who had taken a dislike to Vaillant.

"Undoubtedly I was!"

"That is not saying much for the discernment you displayed in choosing your friends."

"Perhaps not," was the careless reply.

"Will you give us the history of the attempted crime," said Fernandez, who wished to make the matter plainer to his guests.

"Certainly," answered Varney Vaillant.

John had during this colloquy stood still near the door. It was interesting to him, for his indignation was more pretended than real.

"The man Millington was an intimate friend of mine, and, oddly enough, an architect. He attempted to kill me, and reduced me to what I now am."

"Without a cause?" queried Admiral Pillager. "Methinks that is what my friend Bulwer would call 'a strange story.'"

John thanked him in his heart for this observation, and wondered much how he would reply to it.

"No. He fancied he had a cause. His wife was on the point of eloping with me, but she was a consenting party," said Varney Vaillant.

John, for the first time, trembled. He longed—oh, so ardently!—to dash forward, and strangle the lie in his throat, but prudence restrained him.

"Will you swear that she was a consenting party, as you expect some day to appear before your Maker?" he exclaimed.

"I am not addressing my remarks to you, my good sir," said Vaillant, with a cold, contemptuous sneer.

"I am sorry that I should have been the involuntary cause of this unpleasant discussion," John said, turning blandly to the company. "Of course, Mr. Vaillant knows as well as you do that his state of health privileges him to say whatever he likes. He is fully aware that he is secure from chastisement; and as I have no particular wish to be insulted more than I have been already, I will claim your indulgence, and seek the ladies."

"Pray do so." replied Mr. Fernandez.

John proceeded to the apartment in which beauty had located itself. He was pleased, for he felt that he had achieved a triumph. In the first place, he had refused to be tempted by any one; and, secondly, he

had, he trusted, thrown Varney Vaillant off the scent.

He found Julia with some young friends, sitting on a sofa, and at once entered into conversation with them. "How quickly you have got on with the new hotel, Mr. Leslie," said Julia.

"Oh ! yes. My task will soon be over !"

"You will then go to town, I presume?"

"For a time. I have serious thoughts of undertaking a journey to Constantinople, whither I have been asked to go by a firm, who have business there."

"And you would stay there?"

"For a year or two !"

Julia sighed—her colour went and came. John had never spoken one word of love to her—had never given her the slightest encouragement, not even by a look, and yet she loved him.

John was utterly unconscious of this mute adoration, and would have much deplored it had it come within the scope of his knowledge. It sometimes happens that girls love those men who treat them most coldly.

Later in the evening, she was asked to sing, and as every word of her mother was law to her, she did not hesitate to do so when the general request was supplemented by that of Mrs. Fernandez.

"Do your best, my dear ! We know you have not been very well lately, and will make every allowance should you not satisfy yourself."

She did not say "satisfy us," because she knew that her daughter's standard of excellence was higher than the company would fix.

Julia sat down at the piano, and, opening some music, cast one look, half-bashful, half-wildly despairing, upon John ; then she broke into an Irish melody :—

“She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,  
And lovers are round her sighing ;  
But coldly she turns from their gaze and weeps,  
For her heart in his grave is lying.

She sings the wild song of her dear native plains,  
Every note which he loved awaking.  
Ah ! little they think who delight in her strains,  
That the heart of the minstrel is breaking.

She had lived for his love——”

She was unable to utter a word in addition. A tempestuous storm of weeping swept over her soul ; and, holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she walked quickly from the room, too much overcome by her feelings to proceed.

This strange proceeding elicited various remarks from the assembled company—such as “Extraordinary exhibition ;” “Eccentric girl ;” “Fantastically nervous ;” “Most singular ;” “What *can* be the cause of such agitation ?”

Mrs. Fernandez was much annoyed at her daughter’s nervous collapse. She was the cynosure of all eyes ; and the gentlemen whispered among themselves.

“Touched here,” said Admiral Pillager, rapping his knuckles against his heart.

"Eh! what's that?" inquired Mr. Fernandez.

"An affection of the heart, my dear sir."

"Oh! nonsense."

"Did you see her look at Leslie?" exclaimed Varney Vaillant, who was sitting hard by in an arm-chair, the servants having assisted him upstairs.

His remark was addressed to nobody in particular, but the shaft went home, nevertheless; for Mr. Fernandez heard it, and he muttered to himself, "I must look into this."

An expression of pain, anxiety and harassment took possession of his features, and he was glad when his wife returned, leading Julia by the hand.

The paroxysm had passed off, and she was serene again. All the evening she avoided John and his gaze, as if ashamed of her weakness.

The very next day, Mr. Fernandez took an opportunity of speaking to John about a subject which was nearest his heart. He thought himself a very clever fellow, and imagined that he was managing the affair in a manner that defied criticism. They had walked along the esplanade nearly as far as Hove, and were leaning against a boat, hauled up on the beach.

Said Mr. Fernandez, with a fatherly suavity in his tone, "I was talking to my wife about Julia."

"Indeed!" John said, absently, as if Julia were nothing in the world to him.

"Mrs. Fernandez was of opinion that the girl had arrived at an age when she might well think of getting married."

"Plenty of time for that," replied John, who felt it incumbent upon him to say something.

"No; not so much time as you seem to think, Leslie," rejoined Mr. Fernandez; "early marriages are the custom and the fashion now-a-days. Look at the royal family."

"Why; yes. They certainly rush rapidly into the holy estate."

"Of course they do. Now, my girl, Julia, is as good a girl as ever lived. What do you think?"

"Excellent," John said.

"He bites. Well-angled, indeed!" was Mr. Fernandez' mental exclamation. "What do you think a man like me could afford to give his daughter, Leslie?" said Fernandez, with a pompous smile, putting his fingers in his waistcoat pockets, and looking upon the vast expanse of blue sea, stretched out in all the magnitude of its limitless beauty. "Eh! what do you fancy I could afford to give?"

"To give?"

"Yes; as her portion!"

"On her marriage?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, a few thousands, I should say!"

"So should I say," cried Mr. Fernandez, with a laugh. "I haven't been in business all these years for nothing! Not I!"

"Business is a fine thing!" John soliloquised.

"Of course it is, or I couldn't give Julia thirty thousand pounds!" answered Mr. Fernandez, proudly.



"Eh? But that's a large sum!" John ejaculated.

"To be sure it is. It's a thousand a-year in the Three per Cents., Leslie, and it's double that in a guaranteed six per cent. Government loan. It's a fortune for any man, though there are plenty who'd be glad to take a well-educated, good-looking girl without a dowry; but I repeat that I will give the man who marries Julia thirty thousand down!"

"Then you will behave very liberally, sir; and if you act as you propose, you will have nothing to reproach yourself with!"

"I should think not. Now, you're a man of the world, where shall I look for a husband for my girl?"

"Surely, you know best!"

"Oh, you modest fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Fernandez, with a sly smile. "Throw off the mask, now. I know you love her, and the little minx loves you. Take her, my boy; and may you be happy together, is the prayer of a fond and doting father."

John was so astounded at this unexpected climax to the conversation, that he was literally dumbfounded.

Mr. Fernandez passed his hands over his eyes, as if he would wipe away a tear.

"Mr. Fernandez——" began John.

"Bless 'em both, I say!" exclaimed that gentleman, as if indulging in flowery visions of the future.

"Will you listen to me?" cried John. "I cannot too much regret that this conversation should have taken place between us. I did not seek it; and if I

had guessed to what it was tending, I would have crushed it in the bud."

"But why, Leslie? Isn't thirty thousand enough? I don't mind——"

"You misunderstand me again. The sum you offer is magnificent; and the happy man who secures your accomplished daughter's heart and hand may well be satisfied with it."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mr. Fernandez.

"I mean that, although I am intensely flattered by the honour you have done me by offering me an alliance with your family, it is nevertheless an utter impossibility that I can accept it!"

"Not accept it? Why, the man's mad!"

"No, I am not," said John.

"Clean out of his mind!"

"Pray, allow me to speak!"

"Go on—go on!" replied Mr. Fernandez, sullenly.

"I will, if I may speak confidentially to you."

"As you please."

"Promise me that what I am about to tell you shall never pass your lips."

"You have my word," replied Mr. Fernandez, looking curious, but shockingly annoyed. Every now and then he bit his lips, compressed his hands, and stamped his feet on the ground.

"I cannot marry, Mr. Fernandez," John exclaimed, speaking in a monotonous voice, while a glow suffused his face, "because I have a wife alive."

"You have?"

"Yes ; as I stand here, I speak the truth."

A very stern expression crept into Mr. Fernandez's face, as he laid his hand upon John's shoulder, and exclaimed, in a harsh voice, "All I can say, young man, is, you have acted the despicable part of an impostor !"

"How dare you say that ?" cried John, all his manhood rising within him.

"I say it because it is true ! You hold yourself out to the world as a single man, when you have a wife alive. You mix in genteel society, where you must, of necessity, meet young ladies ; and you lead them to believe that your heart is disengaged. What is this but imposition ?"

"No—no ? You judge me wrongfully !"

"I do nothing of the sort, sir ! You have visited my house under false pretences, and I—I do not thank you for it !"

"I am sincerely sorry for it," said John, penitently.

"What do I care for your sorrow ? You have, mayhap, ruined my daughter's happiness and peace of mind for ever."

"Girls soon get over these things."

"Another remark such as that !" shouted Mr. Fernandez, "and old as I am, I'll fell you to the ground, or try my best to do it."

"Don't be violent," John said, retreating a pace or two.

"You add insult to injury. I say you have caused my girl to love you."

"And I deny it."

"She confessed as much to her mother last night."

"Much as I sympathize with you, Mr. Fernandez," John exclaimed, "I cannot allow you to injure my character unjustly. I am unconscious of ever having given Miss Fernandez the slightest encouragement. Indeed, I have been cold and distant. When I came in contact with you, professionally, I did not feel that I was called upon to open my heart to you, and go into a history of my former and early life. I am not living with my wife. Why I am parted from her is my business, not your's ; therefore I did not enlighten you, nor shall I do so now."

There was a log of wood on the sand, near the side of the boat. An old, weather-beaten log, and on this Mr. Fernandez sat down, saying, as he stirred up the sand with the toe of his boot, "I am very sorry for the poor girl."

"So am I. But what can I do?" John replied. "Your communication took me quite by surprise. I would have kept away from your house."

"You should have been candid with me in the first instance," said the father. "I encouraged your visits under the impression that you were a single man. I own I liked you. I liked your habits, your industry, your manner, and so on. I have always made up my mind for Julia to marry a working man, and—— But why talk? I must begin my work over again."

"When you are calm, you will acquit me of blame."

"Never! I do not know that I am justified in

keeping your secret. Othello said that Desdemona must die, or else 'she'll betray more men.' If I keep your secret, you'll destroy the happiness of more girls."

"I am innocent of any such intention," John said.

"Go! Leave me!" said Mr. Fernandez. "My nerves have been shocked this morning. I am not myself. Henceforth we meet as strangers."

Seeing that further expostulation was useless, John bowed, and walked moodily away.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FATHER AND SON.

WHEN John Millington, otherwise Leslie, came to his stoical resolution of going through life alone for an uncertain number of years—that is to say, until he could convince his wife and his friends that he had thoroughly given up the bad habits which deformed and disgraced the commencement of his career, and that he was worthy of Mildred's love—he did not for one moment think that he should be exposed to such a scene as the one just passed through with Julia's father.

He was living a blameless life, working his way up to the topmost branch of the social tree—slowly but surely; and it passed his comprehension to think how he could innocently have thrown a blight upon the existence of so young, fair, and innocent a creature as Julia Fernandez.

He did not visit at Brunswick Square after what had passed ; but he frequently saw Julia out of doors, and he was shocked to see a great alteration in her. She was pale and ill—wasting away to a shadow.

After a time, Mrs. Fernandez and Julia went abroad—some said to Nice, others to Madeira ; at all events, the house in Brunswick Square was closed, the home broken up, and Mr. Fernandez left to wander about a solitary, ghost-like being. He was often heard to utter threats against John ; but when the hotel was finished, and John went back to London, the architect forgot all about the chairman of the company.

John had found out where Leonard, his wife, and Mildred were living ; and he used to make frequent inquiries respecting them. During one of his inquisitive visits to the neighbourhood, he learnt that his eldest son was at the Bluecoat School, and that he himself was mourned as one dead by all but Mildred, who still looked forward to the return of her husband.

When he had a few hours to spare, one day, he walked to the City, and went to Christ's Hospital, and asked to see Master John Millington.

He was now a little more than thirteen, and a fine, handsome boy for his age. His first impression was, that his mother or Leonard had come to see him, and he was not a little surprised to see a tall, benignant-looking gentleman in the visitor's room.

"How do you do, my little fellow?" said John, all the pride of a father in his offspring making his heart beat wildly. "I am a stranger to you, but I have often

heard of you as a good boy; and I knew you—your father in days gone by.”

“Where is he now?” asked Master John, who was practical in his ideas.

And this was how it happened that John Millington told his son a story.

“I don’t know where he is now,” he replied.

“Mamma often speaks of him,” said Master John.

“Oh! she does, eh? And what does she say of him?”

“She says he will come back some day.”

“Is that all?”

“No. She tells us—that is Milly and I—that she loves him, and teaches us to do the same.”

“Heaven bless her!” cried John.

“Do you think he will come back?” asked the boy.

“I am sure of it,” John said.

“May I tell mamma that? She will be so pleased. Oh, do let me tell her!”

“You may tell her what you like, my dear boy.”

“And are you sure?”

“Perfectly sure.”

Master John clapped his hands.

“Do you remember your father?” said John.

“Not very well. I recollect he came home once, oh, so tipsy! and beat mamma.”

John writhed in spirit, and felt that there was such a thing as retribution.

“That will never happen again,” he said. “When your father comes back he will be very different.”

“Will he?”

‘And your mother will have cause to be proud of him.’

“Will it be long before he comes back? I should like to have a father so, to talk to me, and manage me; for, in the holidays, I am almost too much for mamma. I don’t mean any harm, but I like my own way. Uncle Leonard laughs at me. Did you know Uncle Leonard?”

“Very well, once.”

“He is quite rich, now; and Clara is going to have a carriage next year.”

“Your mother shall have half-a-dozen!”

“And we are going into a larger house.”

“Tell your mother she shall have a palace, and your father will build it for her!”

“Really!” said Master John, thinking he was reading the “Arabian Nights.”

“Can Bluecoat Boys spend money?” exclaimed John.

“Can’t they? Try them!”

“Take these, then.”

He counted five sovereigns into his son’s hand, and the boy’s eyes glistened, John thought, with the anticipation of spending it in juvenile trifles.

“What will you do with it, Master John?”

“You won’t be annoyed, if I tell you?”

“Certainly not.”

“Or angry with me?”

“Oh, no!”

“Then, I shall get a Post-office order, and send it, all but a few shillings, to mamma, because, you



know," he added, sagely, "she depends upon Uncle Leonard, and never likes to take a halfpenny from him more than she can help, so this money will be so nice for her!"

John fumbled in his pocket, drew out his purse, and took from it a roll of notes. His eyes were so full of tears that he could hardly see; but at length he managed to count out notes for a hundred pounds.

"There, my dear child," he said, "put these in your pocket. Take great care of them, for they are worth a hundred pounds. Write to your mother, and when she comes, give them to her."

"What shall I say?"

"Say that a gentleman who knew your father gave them to you for her."

"Are you Mr. Vaillant?" asked the boy, his face clouding.

"Heaven forbid that I should be anything in human form so base!" cried John, starting.

"I am glad of that, because mamma would not have taken the money," Master John said.

"She has taught you to hate the Frenchman, eh?" John replied, his eyes gleaming with pleasure.

"Not to hate, but to dislike him."

"Equally good. Your mother is right, and you will be a fine fellow."

"Will you come and see me again? I like you," exclaimed the boy.

"You will like me better, some day."

"Shall I?"

“Wait a while. You have plenty of time before you. Good-bye! Don’t forget to write to your mother.”

John drew his son towards him, and kissed him on the forehead, and, shaking his hand, left the room hurriedly; he could not trust himself to remain any longer. When he got outside the school, he hailed a cab, jumped in, and when alone, shed a flood of tears. How he longed for the time when he could go to his wife, and reveal himself! Only two years had elapsed, and he did not think that time a sufficient probation.

The next morning, Mildred received a letter from her son, and called at once at the school.

When she returned home, Leonard thought he had never seen her so radiant since the day she was married at Hornsey Old Church.

“Why, Milly, my dear!” he exclaimed, “what has happened?”

“Oh, such joy—such joy!” she replied. “John is alive and well! He has been to see our child, and—and—I can say no more, but that I thank heaven for this last blessing!”

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A CONTESTED ELECTION.

PARLIAMENT had been dissolved, and St. Biddulph Without was minus a member. St. Biddulph returned two members to Parliament, for it was one of the largest of our metropolitan boroughs. A Conservative

had little or no chance in St. Biddulph Without ; but, whenever a vacancy occurred, the Tories put forward a powerful candidate ; and great excitement, together with a vast expenditure of money, was the result.

John Millington had, for a long time, had his eye upon St. Biddulph Without. He thought that if he could seek his wife as a man selected by hundreds to represent them in Parliament, and with M.P. after his name—while he could show a large balance at his banker's,—she would believe in his reparation and atonement, and once more call him her own.

It was thought among the *cognoscenti* that the fate of St. Biddulph Without, in regard to its Parliamentary representative, was in the hands of John Burton Tadcaster, an agent of many years' experience.

With this gentleman, our architect had been on terms of the closest intimacy since the commencement of his prosperous career, as Mr. Leslie. Tadcaster told him, in confidence, that if he would contest the borough, as the friend and champion of the working men, he would carry him in triumphantly, free of cost.

On a certain evening, about a month before the dissolution of Parliament, he dined *en famille* with Mr. John Burton Tadcaster, who was a little, compactly built old man, the most striking part of whose face was his eye—a quick, rapid-revolving grey eye, denoting a capacity, and even a fondness, for active occupation. He was thin, and a great smoker—rarely was he seen without a cigar in his mouth.

His house was an old-fashioned one, in the Maryle-

bone Road. The gate leading into the garden was wrenched off its hinges, and lay useless against the wall. The small garden—save the mark!—was overrun with weeds. The varnish was chipped and cracked off the front door, just for all the world as if a miser, or a broken-down gentleman, lived there; and yet Tadcaster could write a cheque for £100,000.

So little are appearances to be trusted!

Mrs. Tadcaster—a childless wife, wrapped up entirely in her husband, whom she admired beyond the power of words to express—had retired from the dinner-table. Three sorts of wine stood before John, who, sitting in an arm-chair, faced his host, also in an arm-chair. He neither drank nor smoked. Mr. Tadcaster did both.

“A very choice Havannah,” said Mr. Tadcaster, gently driving the smoke out of his mouth. “I cannot say that I object either to smoking or drinking in moderation, mind you; in moderation, because the habit, if indulged, tends to increase the revenue, and, *a fortiori*, the prosperity of the country.”

“I was addicted to both, once,” John said, with a sad smile; “but I have my reasons for not recurring to a bad practice, from which I have divorced myself.”

“Ah, you are, no doubt, well advised, my dear sir; still, if you would like some of the juice of the grape, I shall not make the fact public.”

“My scruples are conscientious, sir,” replied Millington, with dignity.

“I beg a thousand pardons; I find I have been

labouring under a mistake ; let us change the subject," said Tadcaster, who did not, in his heart, believe in John's sobriety and teetotalism. "I was about to talk of the approaching election."

"Have you any news,?" John asked.

"Nothing worth notice. The Tories are going to run two candidates instead of one ; but they have no chance. I rather think one will withdraw at the last moment. I have brought your name forward, and already secured a considerable number of voters on your behalf."

"I wish to be known as John Millington Leslie."

"Quite so—Millington Leslie. That is how the walls will be placarded. I want you to address a meeting this day week, at the St. Biddulph's Athenæum. Be kind enough to make a note of it."

"What are my prospects?"

"Very fair, sir, *very* fair. I have told you that I will bring you in free of expense. I do not mean to say by that, I will pay ~~and~~ the charges incidental to a general election out of my own pocket—far from it. That would be preposterous and absurd. What I mean is that by my way of managing the election, and your candidature, I will extract subscriptions from the public which will reimburse us for the outlay."

"And what will that be?"

"A couple of thousand pounds, as nearly as I can reckon, which is a very cheap price at which to buy a borough like St. Biddulph."

"So I should say."

"If you will devote your energies to speech-making, and gossiping with the electors, we shall take the lead, head the poll, and come in with a large majority."

"I hope so, indeed, Tadcaster," said John; "for I have set my heart on winning this election."

"You shall, sir—you shall."

"If you think I am at all likely to lose, tell me so at once, and I will go into the country, and canvass some smaller borough."

"My dear sir," answered Mr. Tadcaster, with a solemnity which would not have disgraced an owl belonging to Minerva, "you have been well brought forward—that is to say, what we, in the electioneering line, call, well 'worked.' You are popular with the masses, which, at a time when a new Reform Bill is imminent, is a great thing."

"I have to thank you for your zeal on my behalf, and your disinterested friendship," said John.

"Not altogether disinterested. I am paid for what I do, of course, because it is my trade. Yet you have something to thank me for. I could, if I chose, at the eleventh hour, throw you over, and introduce a new man, whom I would carry through in spite of all."

"I trust that our friendship may endure to the discomfiture of our enemy," John replied—"so that we may have no cause to try a passage-of-arms."

"In that wish I cordially acquiesce," said Mr. Tadcaster. "And now, as my wife has coffee ready, I propose that we adjourn to the drawing-room."

"With pleasure."

John supplied Mr. Tadcaster with what ready money he stood in need of, and his canvass proceeded gaily. He had set himself a goal, not to achieve which was misery. His wife and children flitted dimly before his eyes, and he longed once more to place himself at the head of his family, and resume his proper position.

At length, the nomination-day arrived. The hustings were erected, and a huge, noisy, uproarious crowd assembled in front.

John Millington Leslie was proposed by the Sheriff of Middlesex, and seconded by Mr. Burton Tadcaster. Then John, hat in hand, addressed the crowd, who listened attentively. He was the man of the people, and the people paid him marked respect. His observations were thoughtful, and to the point. Rounds of cheers followed every sentence; but when his rivals essayed to speak, such a tumult of groans and hisses arose, that they were inaudible even to the reporters.

After this the show of hands took place, which was entirely for John. A poll was then demanded for the other candidates.

The next day the polling-booths were opened; and no exertions were spared to bring electors to the poll.

At eleven o'clock, John headed the list by three hundred votes, and his majority continued to increase steadily. John was all day at Mr. Tadcaster's private office, in Parliament Street. At four o'clock, his agent drove up, and, rushing into John's presence, exclaimed, "It is all as safe as the bank, my dear sir!"

"Have you the final result?" said John.

"No ; nor shall we have until five o'clock. The returns have to come such a distance from some of the booths ; but our majority is so large, that I fear not."

"Shall I be required to address the electors?"

"To-night, at St. Biddulph's Hall. I have convened a meeting. The Hall will be crowded."

"I am sure my thanks are due to you, Tadcaster."

"Wait awhile, my dear sir, we are not quite out of the wood yet ; there is a leetle bit further to go."

After a few more remarks, he returned to the head committee-room, promising to come back soon."

John amused himself by looking out of the window, and watching the cabs as they passed by, placarded with bills, on which his own name stood forth prominently. It was a relief to John when Mr. Tadcaster made his appearance, and, in hearty tones, congratulated him upon having won the battle, and distanced his opponents. Overcome with emotion, John sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands—"Now, Mildred, I trust I am worthy of you!"

"Did you speak to me?" inquired Mr. Tadcaster.

"No ! I was merely making a remark to myself."

"You seem faint ; allow me to pour out a glass of water."

The cold liquid revived John. The next half-hour passed in the private office of the parliamentary agent was one of the happiest of his life. He felt that he was well off, respected by all men, and that he had, in the fullest sense of the words, "lived it down."

In due course, the evening papers arrived. They



were full of the St. Biddulph election ; and John saw what it was to be a popular man. As he was casting his eye over the paper, his glance fell upon the obituary. He started as he saw the name of Julia Fernandez, aged nineteen, at Nice. Breathing a sigh, he brushed away a tear, for her fate was melancholy in the extreme. Of her untimely decease he was the innocent cause. It came upon him in his hour of triumph, and somewhat damped his joy ; but the cheery tones of Tadcaster, and the congratulations of some active members of his committee, turned his thoughts into another channel ; and poor, innocent, loving Julia Fernandez obtained a niche in the shrine of his memory to weep over silently when in the melting mood, and his thoughts travelled backward over the broadly-marked footsteps of time.

St. Biddulph's Hall was a spacious building, well adapted for acoustic purposes, and capable of holding, at least, three thousand people. Here John went after dinner, accompanied by many of his supporters. He had never addressed so many people before. The sea of heads seemed to swim before him. He endeavoured to make himself oblivious of the vast mass of humanity. He tried to fancy he was wandering in some ancestral park, addressing some grand old oak, whose branches waved approvingly as his words smote the air.

When he appeared, and Mr. Tadcaster had spoken a few words there was a shouting such as could be heard from Dan to Beersheba. Ladies waved their pocket-handkerchiefs until the miles of cambric created quite a mimic breeze, and did the work of seven punkahs.

He waited till all was calm, and then, in the full, rich cadence of his powerful voice, proceeded to thank his friends for their kind support, and to make promises for the future.

How it was, I cannot tell ; but John's eyes travelled through the ocean of faces while he was speaking, and rested upon a little knot of five persons. Perhaps he was attracted by some peculiar odic force—some animal magnetism, which made him fancy he saw Leonard and Clara, Mildred and John, his son, with a fair, fragile, pale-faced little girl, the image of her mother, whom he took to be his daughter.

He derived inspiration from this group of people, and his admirers saw that he spoke as men have seldom spoken before—such fire, such electric force was there in his words and his delivery. He made people's hearts leap in their bosoms that night, and more than one man and woman went away with the firm conviction that a heaven-sent champion had arisen to advocate the holy cause of progress, and preach a new gospel to the poor, the down-trodden, and the oppressed.

There was a commotion in the body of the hall.

"Make way there—a lady has fainted ! Let her be taken outside, so that the fresh air of heaven may play upon her pallid countenance ! That is right, good people—stand on one side ; thank you !"

Now the strong man who holds her in his arms—can pass through the tiny lane made for him. The speech is over. The people roar with admiration and delight. Tadeaster wipes his eyes, and shaking John

by the hand, says, huskily, "Splendid, my dear sir. We all feel as if we had had a hand in a good work; for a new apostle of the people and of progress has arisen in your person!"

"Can I go now?" replied John. "I don't want to leave the building altogether; but I want particularly to speak to—some old friends I see down below."

"Shall I accompany you?"

"No; please stay here, and excuse my absence."

"Very well; be it so," replied Mr. Tadcaster.

On John passed through the rows of men, few of whom recognised him with his hat pulled over his eyes. He heard them saying, "Really grand! Never heard such a speech in my life! He is the man for the people! Wait till he rises at St. Stephen's, no one will be able to stand before him! St. Biddulph ought to be proud of her representative!" and so on, *ad infinitum*.

At last John felt that he had wiped out his disgrace, and with a heart beating with proud exultation, he sought his wife; for it was Mildred who had recognised her husband, and whose delight had so overpowered her.

He found her in a quiet spot, in a retired corridor, near an open window.

Leonard saw the tall form approaching, and knew instinctively who it was. Running forward, he caught his brother by the hand, and said, "Thank God for this, John!"

The friendly pressure was returned; but John could not speak, his tones were too stifled for utter-

ance. He strode on at length, and took Mildred in his arms. The unwonted pressure roused her. She looked up—she saw him—and, with a wild cry, threw herself upon his breast, sobbing.

“At last!—at last! I have watched—I have waited—and at last I am made happy!”

Leonard and Clara stood at the back, in the shadow of the window. This scene was too sacred to be intruded upon.”

“Why have you kept away from me so long?” Mildred quivered. “I would joyfully have struggled with you!”

“It was best not, my own,” John replied. “I vowed when I left the asylum that I would prove myself worthy of you, or never, never approach you again!”

“It is better late than never,” Mildred said, smiling through her tears.

“Am I worthy? Have I passed through the fire, and achieved a purification?”

“Oh, yes, yes!—a thousand times, yes! I feel so proud of you, John, dear! When you were speaking I felt inclined to clap my hands, and cry out,—He is *my* husband! Look at him!—look at my husband!”

\* \* \* \* \*

A short time afterwards, John Millington Leslie, as he still called himself, had his own house a few doors from Leonard, and it was delightful to those who knew them to see how intensely happy the long-separated, but now united, husband and wife were in each other's company.

They loved their children, and they, in their turn, reciprocated the affection of their fond parents. For a time the wife could not realize all her joy. One day they were sitting in the drawing room of their beautifully-furnished house, their children near them, when Mildred exclaimed, "Oh, John, I cannot bring myself to believe that all this is anything but a dream! Kiss me, my darling, to convince me that I am awake!"

He kissed her tenderly, and said, "This is the sunshine, after a long, long storm, my dear, loving wife, and, with the help of Providence, will take care that no clouds overshadow the horizon of our lives again."

**He kept his word.**

**THE END.**



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ESTABLISHED 1814.—BY APPOINTMENT

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